LOVE IS THE LAW

Cuba's Queer Rights' Revolution

Cuba es amor
ni BLOQUEO ni HOMOFOBIA mejor es POSIBLE
con el CÓDIGO de las FAMILIAS ¡ME INCLUYO!
el AMOR es LEY
socialismo SÍ transfobia NO

Gregory E. Williams
EDITOR

Love is the law

CUBA's queer rights' revolution

Edited by Gregory E. Williams

STRUGGLE FOR SOCIALISM LA LUCHA POR EL SOCIALISMO

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Baltimore • Los Angeles • New York

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The Families Code

On Sept. 25, 2022, socialist Cuba held a referendum to update the Families Code of the Cuban Constitution. Even Cuban citizens living abroad were allowed to vote at embassies. The referendum passed with 66.85% in favor. This new legal framework greatly expands the legal rights of women, LGBTQ+ people, children, and others throughout the society. It is a major advancement from the previous Family Code of 1975.

As U.S. transgender communist activist Melinda Butterfield said in a webinar on the Families Code (included in this book), "When it was reported – if it was reported at all in the capitalist media last year when it happened when the referendum was passed – it was just, 'oh, Cuba has finally gotten around to adopting same sex marriage.' But the Families Code is so much bigger than that, and so much more comprehensive, and not only for the queer community, but for all families and all kinds of communities in Cuba."

Indeed, Cuba is carrying out a revolutionary process with the adoption of the Families Code. Not only because of what the new laws say but also because of the way the code was developed. There was a "consultative process" with the Cuban people, a mass-democratic process involving debates throughout the country in neighborhood assemblies, labor unions, and more.

So, no, Cuba didn't simply legalize same-sex marriage. Cuba is undergoing radical social transformation made possible by all the institutions of people's power laid down by the revolution going back to 1959.

Capitalism or socialism?

The contrast between Cuba and the United States could hardly be starker. While Cuba is making rapid progress regarding gender and sexuality, in the U.S. everything is being reversed. The attack on queer and trans people

– especially on trans people – is front and center of the neo-fascist movement that has coalesced around Donald Trump. At the time of this writing, Trump and Elon Musk are gutting the national government. They're not dismantling the repressive state apparatus, mind you (the police and military), just anything that might actually help people. They're trying to undo all the gains made by workers, Indigenous people, women, Black people, LGBTQ+ people. They're trying to get rid of all civil rights protections and regulations that stand in the way of maximum profits for billionaires.

The difference is that Cuba is a socialist country (or a country engaged in the long work of socialist transition) whereas the U.S. is a capitalist country. The U.S. is the capital of capitalism, in fact, the center of the world imperialist system. As such, the U.S. is the main fountainhead of reaction everywhere, including in its sponsorship of right-wing evangelical groups in Cuba that were the main organized force opposing the new Families Code.

We have a real-life scenario to test which is better for LGBTQ+ and other oppressed people, capitalism or socialism. The authors of this book say "socialism!" without reservation.

What's in this book

Following this introduction is an article by Melinda Butterfield chronicling Trump's first month back in office, painting a picture of the incredible danger of fascist rule. While this piece doesn't discuss Cuba, we include it as a broad summation of the political situation in the U.S. This is the government that cruelly keeps Cuba on the terrorist list and under economic blockade. This is the country, along with its Zionist appendage, that is currently committing genocide against the Palestinian people. Cuba doesn't bomb anybody. Cuba sends doctors.

Chapters 1 and 2 chronicle the lead-up to the adoption of the code and its passage. Several Cuban writers are included. The bulk of Chapter 2 are talks from the webinar "What We Can Learn from Cuba's 'Code of Freedom' for Families that was put on by U.S.-based Women in Struggle / Mujeres en Lucha. Along with the Federation of Cuban Women, Women in Struggle is a member organization of the Women's International Democratic Federation / Federación Democrática Internacional de Mujeres. (FDIM)

Women in Struggle led the 2023 U.S. Friends Against Homophobia and Transphobia delegation to Cuba. The material in Chapters 3 and 4 stems from this investigative solidarity trip.

Before that delegation, in 2021, activists with the Struggle for Socialism Party and the Peoples Power Assembly of Baltimore participated in the 31st U.S.-Cuba IFCO-Pastors for Peace Friendshipment Caravan. The reports from that trip are in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 is a text submitted by the Peoples Power Assembly to the United Nations Human Rights Office of High Command UPR (Universal Periodic Review) Platform for Cuba. This section can serve as a useful factsheet on Cuba.

Chapter 7 is a report from a Struggle for Socialism Party and Struggle - La Lucha delegation to an international peace seminar held in Guantánamo. The seminar brought together delegates from 30 countries demanding a world free of U.S. imperialist intervention and military bases.

Chapter 8 is a statement from the Women's International Federation calling for an end to the U.S. blockade against Cuba. The FDIM and Federation of Cuban Women are an integral part of the story of Cuba's ongoing revolutionary process, as documented in this book. The FCW was the driving force behind the 1975 Families Code along with the founding of Cenesex in 1989 – the National Center for Sex Education / Centro Nacional de Educación Sexual. Cenesex has been at the center of gender and sexual liberation in the country. It has also become an international hub, facilitating exchanges between activists, academics, researchers, progressive religious groups, and many others from around the world. Chapter 3 includes delegation reports from visits to both Cenesex and FCW headquarters.

Previously published

The remainder of this volume is the full text of Leslie Feinberg's 2009 book, "Rainbow Solidarity in Defense of Cuba." Feinberg was a revolutionary communist and transgender organizer who died in 2014. Feinberg did a great deal of groundbreaking work, playing a key role in developing a revolutionary approach to the queer and trans struggles within the communist movement in the U.S. and beyond.

The work that Feinberg did on Cuba is the foundation of the present book. "**Rainbow Solidarity**'s" back cover text explains why this is so.

"**Rainbow Solidarity in Defense of Cuba"** documents revolutionary Cuba's inspiring trajectory of progress toward liberation of sexualities, genders, and sexes.

"This groundbreaking book reveals how the Cuban Revolution has grappled with the pre-revolutionary legacy of 450 years of persecution and exploitation of homosexuality.

"**Rainbow Solidarity"** answers the demonization of the 1959 Cuban Revolution by Washington and the CIA, Wall Street, and Hollywood by demonstrating that the process of solving these problems is the forward motion of the revolution.

"Today, after decades of concrete efforts and achievements – together with free health care and education, and jobs and housing for all – Cubans enjoy freedoms regarding same-sex love, transexuality and gender expression in Cuba that don't exist in the United States."

Reading "**Rainbow Solidarity**" is how I and many others first learned about Cuba's achievements – certainly not from the capitalist media. When our U.S. Friends Against Homophobia and Transphobia delegation visited Cuba in 2023 to learn about the Families Code, we were carrying on the work that Feinberg began. This book can be considered a follow-up to "**Rainbow Solidarity**," documenting developments from 2009 through 2024.

– ***Gregory E. Williams***
New Orleans
March 23, 2025

'First they came'

Migrants, trans people are first targets of Trump's fascist rule

Melinda Butterfield *Feb. 1, 2025*

The first 12 days of the new Trump administration have seen an avalanche of attacks on the working class and oppressed peoples of the United States and the whole world. Federal workers, reproductive rights, diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, students opposed to genocide in Gaza, teachers, and AIDS prevention and treatment are just a few of the targets.

The most brutal executive orders have been directed at two especially vulnerable sections of the working class: migrants and transgender people.

The Trump regime has openly and savagely declared its intent to bring home the genocidal policies carried out in Gaza under Biden.

The "shock and awe" of hundreds of executive orders is meant to overwhelm, demoralize, and disorganize workers and our communities, unions, and organizations to make it impossible for people to fight back.

But fighting back, in unity and with massive numbers, is the only way to push back the onslaught and organize a militant resistance to stop this government.

When an executive order freezing all government funding for grants and loans caused state Medicaid and SNAP (food stamp) websites to shut down, the broad and immediate outcry forced the Trump government to temporarily walk back some portions of the freeze. This was a small but important victory.

It's been pointed out that many of Trump's executive orders hold no particular legal weight. Many of them are blatantly illegal and unconstitutional, such as the attempt to repeal birthright citizenship. All will be challenged in court.

But government agencies, businesses, and institutions are rushing to implement these attacks anyway – either because they are eager to do so, or because they fear lawsuits, loss of funding, and repression if they do not.

They all understand that the far-right U.S. Supreme Court has declared Trump and his oligarch allies like Elon Musk exempt from the rule of law.

The word has come down through Trump and his lackeys, IT billionaires who dominate social media, the heights of Corporate America, and the capitalist media: Fascism is what the ruling class wants now, and it's what they shall have.

Democrats in Congress have quietly acquiesced, and sometimes enthusiastically joined in – as Biden and Harris did during the 2024 presidential campaign by refusing to defend trans lives and promoting anti-immigrant measures.

But our power to fight fascism doesn't rest on legalities. It depends on the struggle of class against class. Trump and the bosses understand this very well and will do everything in their power to continue pitting workers against each other to prevent a united resistance.

ICE raids and concentration camps

After Trump's inauguration on Jan. 20, agents of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) were dispatched to several so-called sanctuary cities, where local laws were enacted under the first Trump term in office to prevent local police from collaborating in federal roundups of the undocumented, and others caught up in the web of repression.

On Jan. 29, Trump announced that a detention camp for 30,000 migrants would be opened in the U.S. Naval base that occupies Guantanamo in Cuba. This is where hundreds of illegally detained men were tortured and imprisoned as part of the U.S. "War on Terror." Some spent more than two decades imprisoned there, and as of Jan. 6, at least 15 still remain.

Socialist Cuba, which has been fighting for the return of its rightful territory in Guantanamo, condemned Trump's plan.

The ICE gestapo are supposedly going after migrants accused (not convicted) of crimes and offenses. Yet they have also targeted children in schools,

patients in hospitals, and workers on the job. Some hospitals and school districts have issued guides for workers on how to resist these illegal ICE incursions.

Indigenous peoples, particularly in the Southwest, have reported a surge in detentions and threatened deportations of tribal members, despite being the original inhabitants of this land. Every person of color is considered fair game.

But there is resistance. In cities across the U.S., people are on the lookout for ICE vehicles and federal agents. Community defenders are patrolling vulnerable neighborhoods and distributing "Know Your Rights" information. People are posting photos and locations of suspicious movements on social media to warn their neighbors.

Is it effective? Trump's "border czar," Tom Homan, went on CNN to complain about "well-educated" communities defying ICE: "They call it 'Know Your Rights.' I call it 'how to escape arrest.'"

Trans genocide

The forces backing Trump need and want to continue exploiting immigrant labor. They seek to terrorize immigrant communities with deportations in order to create even more brutal conditions and lower wages for those who remain.

In the case of trans people, though, the goal of the fascist right is outright extermination. Executive orders have come down daily attacking the ability of trans people to live their lives.

Already, passports and other federal documents are being altered, nullified, and seized to hamper people's ability to travel and, if necessary, escape the country. Trump has ordered an end to life-saving gender-affirming care for young people under the age of 19 while laying the groundwork for a ban on trans health care for adults, too. And some hospitals are rushing to comply.

A trans restroom ban in federal facilities goes into effect today, including in government offices, airports and much more. The administration will also push for a restroom ban in all private facilities and workplaces. Trans soldiers are being expelled from the U.S. military.

Trans women in federal prisons are to be transferred to men's prisons to be tortured, raped, and murdered, as already happens in many states. Teachers are threatened with being prosecuted as "sex offenders" if they acknowledge the real names and genders of their trans students.

These measures will further escalate anti-trans violence on the streets and in schools, as well as suicides, especially for youth.

All of it is being couched in hypocritical language about "protecting" children and women.

No LGBTQIA+ people are safe from the storm. On Jan. 29, Idaho state representatives called on the U.S. Supreme Court to overturn its 2015 ruling legalizing same-sex marriage nationwide – a move the right-wing justices have already hinted they plan to make soon.

Every statement and executive order names trans people as one of the main causes of the country's problems.

Make no mistake: Extermination of trans lives is the aim of the capitalist ruling class and the Trump regime. This community has been assigned the role of scapegoat.

For trans people, the only option being presented is to go back into the closet. If we cannot or will not do so, we are to be criminalized, imprisoned and tortured, or eventually murdered outright.

Which side are you on?

Many of us learned about the prose poem "First They Came" in school. It was written after World War II by German pastor Martin Niemöller, who originally collaborated with the Nazi regime, then discovered he was not safe from the ravages of fascism himself.

"First they came for the communists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a communist

"Then they came for the socialists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a socialist

"Then they came for the trade unionists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a trade unionist

"Then they came for the Jews
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Jew

"Then they came for me
And there was no one left
To speak out for me."

The poem was written as a warning to future generations: Ignore the plight of fascism's first victims at your own peril, because your turn will come.

Some groups targeted by Hitler and his Nazis were left out of the poem, however – notably, the migratory Roma and Sinti peoples, and also queer people, who were shipped off to concentration camps marked with a pink triangle. This symbol was later famously reclaimed by ACT UP in the fight against government neglect of the AIDS epidemic.

One of the first targets of the Nazi regime in Germany was the Institute of Sexual Science in Berlin, led by Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld. Hirschfeld was a pioneer of gender-affirming health care for trans people. The institute was an advocate and safe haven for trans people in the Weimar era that preceded the Nazi takeover.

So reviled were trans lives that the post-war German capitalist government and many "experts" refused to acknowledge that trans people were victims of the Holocaust until a court case in 2022 finally forced a measure of recognition.

(In the antifascist German Democratic Republic – socialist East Germany – pre-Hitler science on homosexuality and transgender was partially recovered, before the counterrevolution and German reunification in 1990. Notably, East German understanding of queer lives informed the development of Cuba's policies, leading to the revolutionary new Families Code in 2022.)

Will working-class organizations be able to relearn history's lesson in time to fight back in defense of its most vulnerable members? Or will these extinguished lives be relegated to the first line of a new "First They Came" decades in the future?

How these questions are answered will decide the fate of the working class in the U.S. and worldwide for many years to come.

The Code of Families, a document built among all Cubans

Alejandra Garcia *Resumen Latinamericano Feb. 3, 2022*

This week, Cuba began a historic process as Cubans started to going to more than 78,000 meeting points to discuss the new draft of the Family Code, a broad, complex, but very important process for Cuban families.

The document is the result of many people who have studied the Cuban social landscape for a long time. It is not a text fabricated by a single-family or a single person, and it did not just show up over night as a fait accompli. "We did not shut ourselves in around a table to invent non-existent realities. Here all Cuban families reflected in one way or another," the president of the National Electoral Council (CNE) Alina Balseiro Gutierrez explained.

These meetings, which will last until April 30, are not to disagree or discuss any issue, but to gather information and process it. It is a search procedure that will allow the legal authorities to detect if anything has been left unsaid.

We are facing a revolutionary document, which includes changes of perspective in many aspects of our society's daily life. It addresses family plurality and the right of people from the LGBTQ community to marry, opens new horizons to labor relations, and refers to the urgent attention that should be paid to the aging population.

"This will be a Code of affections. Good behavior, attention, and care in the family environment will have their reward. Likewise, abandonment, negligence, and emotional and economic neglect will also have their consequences in the Code," Alvarez-Tabío added.

One of the most transcendental changes in the text will be around the family plurality issues. Everyone will have the right to form a family united by the affection of its members.

The norm clarifies that affiliation is the relationship established between mothers and fathers with their sons and daughters. However, it adds that this affiliation has been radically transformed. It is no longer just consanguineous parentage.

Affiliation can also be determined through the use of an assisted human reproduction technique, or it can also be defined by socio-affectivity (that bond of love, of feelings that unites two people, grandparents, and grandchildren, nieces and nephews…) There is a plurality of sources that can give rise to legal parentage.

"It is important to read carefully each letter of the Family Code to discover that there are many benefits for many people in the family space, and not only in the aspect of marriage," added Balseiro, who is a Doctor in Legal Sciences.

The text also opens new horizons to labor relations. It proposes regulations related to unpaid licenses for family responsibilities, which will benefit those people who are dedicated to the care of family members in vulnerable situations. This decision was taken into account due to the accelerated population aging in Cuba, and the shift of the main caregiver roles to women, who sometimes, by family decision, leave their jobs to devote themselves to this task.

Each proposal in the Code shows how it will benefit all legal relationships in Cuban society. No one will be left behind. Families will be viewed in the plural, in accordance with the current diverse, plural, and democratic scenario. The text will add rights and will make visible family models that were not recognized until now, in a country that does not stop looking inside itself and thinking about its people, despite the adversities.

Families, plural

Leidys Maria Labrador Herrera *Granma May 19, 2022*

Recognizing the existence in Cuba of multiple family structures that break with the traditional model is among the most significant elements of the new Families Code, being drafted.

Accepting the plurality evident in Cuban society when it comes to this fundamental unit, allows for the inclusion and protection of families that break from the most traditional and conservative models, providing them rights and opportunities.

It also gives our law a profoundly inclusive character and opens the doors to the elimination of backward prejudices that no longer have a place in a just society like Cuba's. The truth is, as renowned experts in diverse family matters have stated, that this is a code honoring the bonds of affection and love, on which families are truly built.

The first steps...

The broad popular consultation before the referendum that approved the current Constitution was undoubtedly the first sign of the need for a Families Code more in line with the changes and growing diversity of Cuban families environment over time.

The controversies generated in the debate of articles such as the marriage between two people, instead of a man and a woman, showed there was a wide sector of the population struggling to have those unions recognized, another that knew little or nothing about it, and a third that still harbors backward ideas on that matter.

Finally, article 81 of the Constitution of the Republic of Cuba provides that "the State recognizes and protects the family, no matter how it is organized, as the basic cell in society and it creates the conditions to guarantee that its purposes may be achieved as a whole. Families may be constituted legally or by common law, based on love and the equality of rights, obligation and opportunities for its members."

If we read this article carefully we can see some concepts that are now reflected in the bill of the new Families Code.

It can be said then that the bill embraces a principle of respect to plurality and lead us towards a more comprehensive vision of what we see as the fundamental unit of society.

The eyes of love

People say everything is possible when we look at it with the eyes of love. Therefore, during these months, with the support of experts and from within the homes and the communities, a broad popular consultation has been conducted, during which the draft code was widely accepted as the codes of affection.

Deconstructing patterns deeply rooted in the collective mentality is not an easy task, but the first step is to begin with respect and acceptance.

We must be aware that this is not at all about proving that the traditional family does not exist anymore. This structure is common, and will remain, without a doubt. The purpose is to understand there are other family structures, which also deserve protection.

A family can also be a single mother, or father, who raises their children alone. A family can be one in which the spouses are of the same sex. Or one composed only of grandparents and grandchildren because the parents are out of the picture. Ultimately, it is the space where affective ties are strong enough to allow for the construction of a unit in which all members have the same rights and opportunities.

As the Act states, "Different family structures, based on a relationship of affection, are created among relatives, whatever the nature of the relationship, and between spouses or in common-law unions."

"The members of the families are bound to perform family and societial duties on the basis of love, affection, consideration, solidarity, fraternity, co-participation, protection, responsibility and mutual respect."

In other words, a family is not successful based on its structure or the number of members.

A family is a social structure that recognizes itself as such and takes on the duties and responsibilities it entails.

The 'other' families

Given the real possibility (from the legal standpoint) of being recognized and supported in terms of rights, several families that do not fit the traditional structure have opened the doors to their lives, which usually remain close because they are usually the target of accusing looks who judge them because of their ignorance rather than truly discriminatory feelings.

It is not strange that people reject what they do not know or want to keep their eyes shut when facing something they consider taboo.

Nonetheless, both in popular consultation meetings, the mainstream media and social networks, new platforms have been opened to disseminate testimony to this reality, demonstrating that love and true feelings are capable of shattering barriers and that, many times, dreams and expectations are no different from those of traditional families.

Families in which there is only one parent, the spouses are of the same sex, or grandparents are in charge of raising the children, to present just a few examples, in no way produce a bad upbringing, or internal conflicts of greater complexity or dysfunctionality.

If we let prejudice and established patterns condition our thinking, we will lose the wonderful opportunity to understand the world and therefore, to be a better part of it.

We do not choose our families, or do we?

Many times, people say that we do not choose our family. It is what it is. If you like it or not, well, there is no choice.

Although it is not possible to change blood relation objectively speaking, this is a very relative statement when it comes to the subjective aspect of it.

Truth is that, beyond the family environment a person grows up in, everyone has the right to form their own family, with their own particularities. A family in which a human being can feel truly fulfilled and happy.

As varied as the family structures that surround us, or more, are the ideas that people have as to what they call a family.

Precisely, the first family right provided in the bill of the new Families Code is the opportunity to build one. Of course, the principles on which a family should be built are clearly stated in the new bill and they all have a central idea, dignity is the supreme value when it comes to the relationships within the family.

Hence, if the family we want, the one we dream about, the one that meets our expectations as human beings, is indeed chosen and built, there is no doubt it will always be our shelter and support.

All families, all models

The bill of the new Families Code, if approved, will be an instrument of profound scope that will be among the most advanced currently in force in our continent. And this says a lot about the path the Cuban society has taken.

Under the principle that love is the first condition a family needs to exist, the new Families Code has the merit of broadening the concepts of inclusion we have known so far, of putting a name to what we could not practically name one day, of moving forward toward the naturalization of family structures whose status in matter of rights have remained uncertain for years.

This document, of which any Cuban who has read it can speak at length, is a major qualitative leap towards one of the primary targets of our social system: to fight all types of discrimination.

This code is a mirror that truthfully reflects the families that exist in Cuba today.

Beyond abortion, a struggle to win our future

Cheryl LaBash *May 17, 2022*

Havana, Cuba – When you have touched a woman you have struck a rock, says a South African proverb. It continues, you have dislodged a boulder, you will be crushed. The U.S. Supreme Court justices who penned the recently leaked draft majority opinion abolishing voluntary legal pregnancy termination, should take heed.

Although the current debate centers on the issue of the women's right to make decisions over their own bodies, in fact much more is at the root. Today's political flashpoint holds within it the urgent need to overturn patriarchal gender norms, class oppression and the capitalist economic system that perpetuates them. The fight is really for life for the majority, not just for the few.

This is not political jargon. The combat between the past and the future can be seen in real time when Cuba's proposed Families Code and 2022 National Program for the Advancement of Women is compared with the hateful onslaught faced by women in the United States where the Equal Rights Amendment is still blocked.

In the United States, rights that were thought to have been won, at least in part, are now being slashed, eroded or reversed like the right to legal, safe abortion, or like universal voting rights. It must be noted that the U.S. is still the only industrialized country without a national health plan, so payment for medical procedures even where legal may not be covered by private insurance and require out of pocket payment. A poll published by CNBC.com reported that "66% of Americans fear they won't be able to afford health care" in 2021.

All Cubans can afford health care

On the other hand, no Cuban need fear they won't be able to afford health care in any year. Despite the undeniable fact that the U.S. economic, commercial, financial and media war against revolutionary socialist Cuba hurts

every aspect of daily Cuban life, all health care from organ transplants to abortion is the right of every Cuban who needs it. Not Obama Care, not Medicare for All – free, universal, community-based preventive health care.

Revolutionary Cuba leaves no stone unturned to provide these rights even hampered by the laser-focused, intensified U.S. blockade. Somehow, through working together with solidarity, they do it: Witness the herculean COVID-19 vaccine development, now expanding to protect the six-month to two-year age group.

The right to health care and debate about abortion were settled in Cuba long before the recent green bandana advances in Argentina, Colombia and Chile. Nonetheless, the Cuban people, too, are in the midst of debating rights – but not the rights for capitalists and landlords to exploit and steal or Big Pharma extortion for medicines. The groundbreaking 1975 Family Code that codified gender equality in the home and in society is being updated, modernized, and strengthened with more equality and inclusion, more protection, not less. Significantly, even the title has been changed from Family Code to Families Code.

As presented by Federation of Cuban Women leader Teresa Amarelle Boué, Secretary General of the Federation of Cuban Women, at the March 2022 U.S.-Cuba Normalization Conference in New York City, the proposed revisions include the rights of children and seniors, as well as expanding benefits important to and sought by women workers such as in-workplace childcare. Even with resources severely stunted by the U.S. economic warfare, the code proposes to boost income 50% for working women with three or more children under 18. Six thousand one hundred and eleven of these women and their children already received a new home free of charge, fully resolving their housing needs. Even more could be done without the U.S. blockade, she said. Community laundries are a new win-win proposal that provides new jobs while alleviating some household labor.

Child poverty across the U.S.

Contrast this with the U.S. where a "right to life" banner is cynically used to restrict women's reproductive autonomy. In the U.S., right to life is purported to begin at conception, but stops before birth, sending Black

Photo: Bill Hackwell

maternity and infant death rates to scandalous heights in the richest country on the globe. In 2020, 16% of children under 18 years of age, 11.6 million, live in poverty. Students graduate from university with unpayable student loans. Tickets to concerts and sporting events are out of reach for most. The right to health care, education, housing, sports and culture and a dignified life with the possibility of developing each human's potential are all constitutionally guaranteed in Cuba.

Gender reassignment has notably been free in Cuba as part of medical care. Now free fertility assistance including surrogacy under certain conditions is included in the proposed Families Code, something unthinkably unaffordable to many in the U.S. who are unable to have children.

The Families Code provides legal rights for the various family formations that actually exist in Cuba today – officially married, or committed relationships without formality, same-sex relationships, grandparents or other close relatives raising children and more. Rights are expanded, not restricted so each family choice and need is respected. Amarelle explained the improvements this way:

"This is a code of opportunities and alternatives, of adding and multiplying, that recognizes and guarantees rights for those who didn't have them. In no way does it affect or limit the rights already recognized for others.

"It does not establish molds nor does it require anyone to choose a family model that is not the one desired by each family.

"It is a broad and comprehensive code, revolutionary and modern." *(transcript of simultaneous translation by Martin Koppel, https://youtu.be/wJJfDeVi3gI)*

Cuba expands rights of children

The rights of children are expanded. The term "patria potestar" or parental authority was replaced with parental responsibility meaning physically and psychologically capable to guarantee and protect the rights, well-being and the happiness of the daughters and sons, provide participation, to listen to them, protect them, bring them love, foster their growth and independence in an atmosphere of affection.

The discussions are not pro-forma to check off some abstract requirement, but take into consideration the comments, additions, suggestions and proposals gathered through multiple opportunities in 78,000 assemblies. As of the March conference, the version under discussion is the 24th draft. After approval by the National Assembly the final product of the consultations will then be voted on by the people in a national referendum, where as a result of the consultation processes, voters actually understand what they are voting on.

The secret weapon of socialist Cuba

Equality and development of the potential of each human being is the secret weapon of socialist Cuba. The current U.S. efforts to push women back into some past family form conflicts with development of technology and our globalized world.

This equality was fundamental in the revolutionary process itself, recognized and promoted by the historic leader of the 1959 Cuban revolution, Fidel Castro Ruz. Women clandestine leaders like Celia Sanchez, Haydée-

Santamaria, Melba Hernandez and Vilma Espin also joined Fidel and the July 26 Movement in the Sierra Maestra.

Fidel also supported the formation of a battalion of women combatants, the Marianas, named after Mariana Grajales, mother of five sons including Antonio Maceo who fought and died for an end to slavery and Cuban independence from Spain. Weapons were scarce, but Fidel prioritized arming the Marianas who were regarded as the best fighters. After the victory over the U.S.-backed Batista dictatorship Fidel and Vilma Espin founded the Federation of Cuban Women to erase the legacy of colonialism through education and job opportunities. Tradition's chains were severed when thousands of young women joined Cuba's historic Literacy Campaign teaching the country to read and write in a year. The success of this process is evident today where women scientists and technicians are integral leaders in the development and production of Cuba's five COVID-19 vaccines.

The following statistics were presented by the FMC delegation to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW66):

Women: 67.4% of workers in education, more than 70% of judges and attorneys general, 62% of doctors and 64.2% of those working in international collaboration in countries around the world. Participation in decision-making is increasing. As of the end of 2021, women held 51.6% of State and Government positions including 52.3% of the State Council, 52.7% of Municipal People's Power Assemblies, 53.22% of parliamentary representatives, 54.35% of the Municipal Assembly presidents and vice-presidents.

So what are we fighting for? The Supreme Court has forced the question. Let's answer it. Cuba represents our future.

día cero
el amor se hizo ley
El Código Sí Suena
Lecturas Colectivas
del Código de las Familias

Cuba prepares for referendum on progressive Family Code

Peoples Dispatch *Sept. 17, 2022*

The new Family Code, drafted in consultation with the general public, is considered to be the world's most inclusive and progressive code

Cuba is set to hold a popular referendum on its new Family Code, which changes the concept of the family nucleus and expands women's rights and LGBTQ+ rights. This Sunday, on September 18, Cuban citizens living abroad, and next Sunday, on September 25, citizens in Cuba will vote to decide whether to "approve" or "reject" a new progressive Family Code, which has been drafted in consultation with the general public.

This referendum is an unprecedented democratic exercise in Cuba since, for the first time in the country's history, a referendum on a code is being held. Until now, only constitutional referendums have been held in the country. Additionally, it is a pioneering event in the world, as Cuba has become the first country to have submitted a Family Code to popular consultation and referendum. The new Family Code is also considered the most inclusive and progressive code in the world.

The new code guarantees the right of all people to form a family without discrimination, legalizing same-sex marriage and allowing such couples to adopt children. It allows for parental rights to be shared among extended and non-traditional family structures that could include grandparents, step-parents, and surrogate mothers. It also adds novelties such as prenuptial agreements and assisted reproduction.

It boosts women's rights, promoting equal sharing of domestic responsibilities and extending labor rights to those who care full-time for children, the elderly, or people with disabilities. It establishes the right to a family life free from violence; that values love, affection, solidarity, and responsibility. It codifies domestic violence penalties and outlaws corporal punishment. It states that parents will have "responsibility" instead of "custody" of chil-

dren and be required to be "respectful of the dignity and physical and mental integrity of children and adolescents." It also asserts that parents should grant maturing offspring more say over their lives.

On Thursday, September 15, during the Round Table with members of the drafting commission and the National Electoral Council (CEN), Justice Minister Oscar Silvera Martínez noted that the new Family Code "protects human dignity, all family law institutions, eliminates any vestige of discrimination in the family sphere and rejects violence." He highlighted that "its preparation process was a complex exercise, widely democratic and had diverse views from science, multidisciplinarity and the cultural aspects of the Cuban people, which reinforces the quality of the regulations."

Last month, Silvera Martínez, confirming the date of the referendum and thanking those who contributed to the process, said that the Family Code "is worthy of its people and a reflection of its reality, which reaffirms the humanist character of the Revolution and leads our State and society in the search for a fairer Cuba."

Cuba's current Family Code was written in 1976 and was one of the only aspects not addressed by the 2019 Constitutional Reform. In 2018, during the discussions and meetings on constitutional changes, while opinions were divided, it was found that there was significant support for the recognition of marriage outside of the hetero-normative conception. The commission felt that it was something that needed more discussion with people. Eventually, the National Assembly of People's Power decided to omit the definition of marriage, leaving it to be decided in the family code and not the constitution. Nevertheless, marriage as a contract between two partners remained, without specifying the definition of the parties that are and are not allowed to enter it.

Following the approval of the new constitution in February 2019, the members of the drafting commission began working on a new Family Code. By September 2021, 22 versions of the new code were presented. In December 2021, the National Assembly approved the draft submitted to popular consultation in February 2022.

Three months of popular consultation, in which 6,481,200 voters or 75.93 % of a total of 8,535,742 participated with 336,595 interventions in more than 79,000 meetings throughout Cuba, led to changes to 49.15% of the content of the draft. This draft, with suggestions from citizens, underwent a new evaluation by the National Assembly and was unanimously approved in June. Now, it is awaiting its ratification in the popular referendum.

As established in the Constitution, all citizens over 16 years of age are eligible to vote in the referendum. The new Code must receive more than 50% of the valid votes in order to be applied as a law. According to the data issued by the CEN, 61% of those consulted on the referendum expressed themselves in favor of the new code.

On Saturday, September 17, in anticipation of the vote, activists and community members participated in a bike caravan to mobilize support for the new Family Code and took to social media with the HT #CodigoSí (#CodeYes).

https://twitter.com/DvidTwit/status/1570815730161156097

Nuestro país celebra con orgullo el Día Internacional contra la Homofobia, la Transfobia y la Bifobia. Entre todos construimos un Código de las Familias que apuesta por el respeto, la inclusión y los derechos de todas las personas. En #Cuba el #AmorEsLey y lo seguirá siendo.

Our country proudly celebrates the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia. Together, we built a Families Code that champions respect, inclusion, and the rights of all people. It was #Cuba #AmorEsLey will continue to be so.

– Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez

Cuba says *YES* to the Code of Families!

Alejandra Garcia *with Resumen Latinoamericano Sept. 26, 2022*

Havana – Cuba dawned today with great expectation for the long-awaited news: The Family Code will be law after the majority of Cubans supported the document during the popular Referendum held on Sunday.

Early this morning, the president of the National Electoral Council (CEN), Alina Balseiro Gutiérrez, announced in a live broadcast that the preliminary results of the vote count have affirmed that the Code will be law.

The count at this point has determined that 3,936,790 of the 6,251,786 Cubans who went to the polls voted Yes for the document (66.87 percent). With most of the ballots counted, the electoral authority assured that 1,950,090 people voted NO, (33.13 percent).

"Although some constituencies in three provinces are still counting, the CEN certifies these results as valid and irreversible," the president of the CEN said and congratulated the people for their participation in the legislative process and for the discipline and civility demonstrated during the Referendum.

"The official results will be released later today, but it can already be confirmed that the Family Code has been ratified," she stressed.

The results are a reflection of Cuba's need to have a new Code of Families, one that portrays the country we are and the one we want to be, that complements the humanist essences of the Constitution, and that leads us towards a fairer and more inclusive country.

The results are not a surprise. The document was submitted to a popular consultation at the beginning of 2022 and was built on the basis of almost individual experiences and needs of Cubans. Each one was a legislator with input, and expectations grew along with the document, which advocates affection and love.

However, since the Code began to be designed some conservative sectors of the country tried to incite the 'No' because some of the rights it extends -such as the possibility that two people of the same sex can marry or adopt children – goes against their religious beliefs.

"There are people who, by faith or creed, have not understood that the Code doesn't deny the type of family they defend, but rather gives guarantees for other types of families," the Cuban president said after casting his vote on Sunday.

At the same time, there were toxic campaigns on social networks and in the extreme right-wing media sponsored from U.S. Florida to incite Cubans to say No, under the argument that "supporting the bill means supporting the government."

It is a new strategy to demonize and discredit the Cuban Revolution. "If the Code said the complete opposite of what this one says, those haters would also be criticizing it," Diaz-Canel clarified.

"It is not a problem of convictions, reasoning, or feelings; there are people who adopt that position because they consider that if it is a Code within the Revolution, then it should not be approved," he added.

But Cuba, with our love, and the heterogeneity of our society won. September 25, 2022, is already a historic day. Cuba proved once again that building a revolution means never stopping the search for more justice, in spite of adversities.

Open letter to LGBTQ+ activists:

Learn from Cuba! End the blockade!

Melinda Butterfield *Oct. 9, 2022*

In September, Serena Brennerman, a 16-year-old white trans woman, was found drowned in Salem, Oregon. Serena's death was ruled a suicide by the police. But her friends and community don't believe it. She was physically harassed by bigots in her school for a long time. Some of this violence was even captured on video. Whether Serena was murdered or took her own life, she was a victim of the trans panic being pushed by the rich and powerful and embraced by violent neo-Nazis and TERFs.

There's no ambiguity about the murders of Semaj Billingslea, a Black trans man, who was shot to death in Jacksonville, Florida, on Sept. 21, or Mya Allen, a Black trans woman, who was murdered on Aug. 29 in Milwaukee. Nearly three dozen trans people have been killed so far this year, most of them people of color, and that's only counting those who were correctly gendered and identified.

There's a war against trans, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming people in this country. It's not new. But it has escalated to unprecedented heights in the last year and is spilling over into the whole LGBTQ2S community and those who support us.

Doctors and children's hospitals are threatened with bombings. Neo-Nazis shut down drag events, often aided by local cops. Parents are threatened with prosecution for supporting their trans kids. We are increasingly threatened and accosted on the street, in stores, on public transportation, with slurs and threats.

What are the supposed friends of the LGBTQ+ community in Washington doing to stop this? Not a damn thing. They tell us to vote for them, the way they told women to vote for them before standing aside and letting abortion rights be stripped away. Meanwhile, alleged progressives like

Hillary Clinton and the New York Times are spouting TERF rhetoric and dismissing trans rights.

The Biden administration and Congress have made it crystal clear that their priority is funding wars for empire on the other side of the world, not protecting the rights of people here.

It's painful to watch. But we are not powerless.

On Sept. 25 something incredibly important happened just 90 miles from U.S. shores. After three years of democratic discussion and education at all levels of society, the people of socialist Cuba voted by a two-thirds margin for a new Code of Families. It enshrines in law the rights of queers, trans people and women in marriage and adoption. It changes the fundamental relationship between parents and children to one based on responsibilities and rights. It elevates chosen families to the same status as blood families. It embraces the rights that are being stripped away from us or that we never had at all.

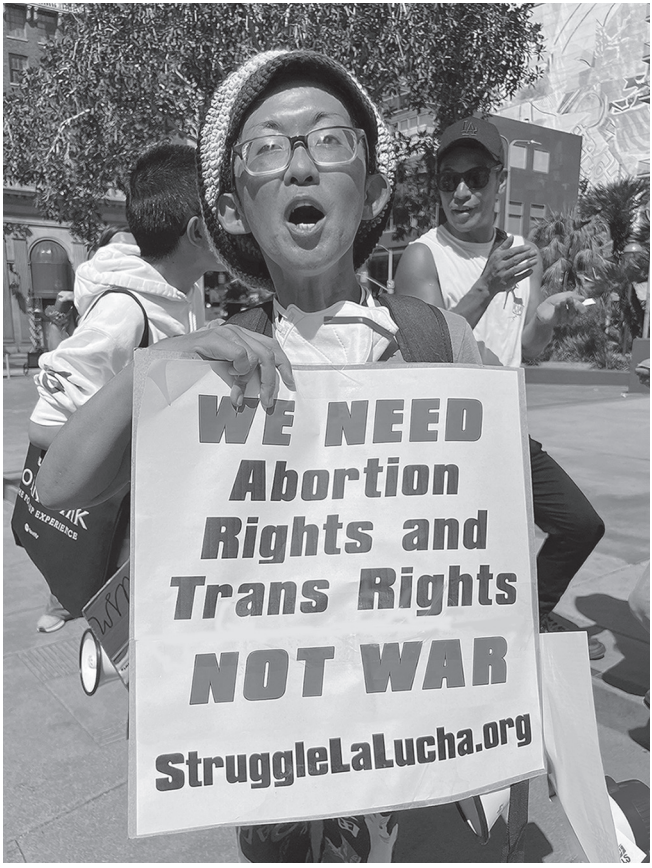
In the U.S. media this was reduced to a vote for gay marriage. The *Washington Post, Fox News, CNN* and the rest don't want people in this country to know what Cuba's Code of Families is, or how it was achieved. They especially don't want the trans and LGBTQ+ community to know, because people here might realize that we need to fight for what Cuba has: free health care, including gender-affirming care, free education, including comprehensive sex education, the right to housing and work and dignity for all.

There's an old liberal saying from the 1960s that those who make reform impossible make revolution inevitable. Today's liberals don't mention that much, because it's a damning indictment of their own inaction and complacency.

Cuba made a revolution to get out from under the thumb of the U.S. empire. Washington has been punishing Cuba ever since. Cuba has been subject to a 60-year economic blockade on trade, medicine, food and more. Trump tightened the blockade and Biden has kept his hateful measures in place despite the pandemic and climate collapse.

One of the most hateful and destructive policies of the U.S. empire is using the rights of trans people, LGBTQ+ people and women as an excuse to attack other countries around the world in its wars for profit. It's so obvious right now, as our own limited rights are being viciously stripped away.

We need to rely on ourselves, not corporate-sponsored politicians, to fight for our rights. We need to build alliances with other people here and around the world who are fighting for their rights and against the U.S. empire. Trans people who are on the front line of so much abuse and bigotry can play a leading role in building a revolutionary movement here. Just look at how trans and other queer workers at Starbucks and Amazon have become an incredible force for organizing unions.



Tsukuru Fors in Los Angeles on October 1, 2022, the National Day of Action to End Violence and Genocide on Transgender People.

SLL photo

SLL photo: Melinda Butterfield

May 5, 2023 n Cuba

Bigots say get back, we say fight back!

Protect trans kids! Unblock Cuba!

Cuba says yes to 'code of freedom' for families

Melinda Butterfield *Oct. 3, 2022*

On Sept. 27, two days after the historic referendum approving Cuba's new Code of Families, diplomats held a special briefing at the Cuban Mission to the United Nations in New York City.

The evening gathering was attended by about a hundred people, including progressive attorneys and judges, representatives of nonprofits dedicated to protecting children and LGBTQ2S people, U.N. diplomats from friendly countries, and Cuba solidarity activists. Cuba's Ambassador to the U.S., Lianys Torres Rivera, traveled from Washington, D.C., to attend.

Two things were immediately apparent: the immense pride of the Cuban representatives in the victory of the new Code of Families; and the hunger of people from the U.S. to learn from Cuba's experience in light of ongoing right-wing efforts to roll back people's rights here.

Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla opened the meeting. He explained that Cuba's revolutionary government and mass organizations were long committed to updating and strengthening the country's 1975 Family Code to reflect modern social realities.

Originally, Rodríguez explained, equality in marriage rights for same-sex couples and other updated provisions were to be included in the 2019 Constitution. But the democratic consultations throughout Cuban society at that time revealed there was no consensus on these questions.

It was decided to set the issues aside to permit more discussion and education, leading to the referendum on the Code of Families.

Rodríguez reviewed the enormous obstacles Cuba has faced in the last few years – from the COVID pandemic to climate-change-fueled disasters to last summer's terrible fuel fire – and of course, underlying all these problems, the tightened U.S. blockade and sabotage.

In addition to expanding the definition of the family beyond the hetero-normative conception, the Code also enshrines the rights of women, promotes gender equality, protects the role of grandparents and much more.

"We launched the referendum in these difficult conditions because we are committed to a family model based on social justice," Rodríguez said. The discussion in the leadup to the Sept. 25 vote "exposed differences, but that it was ratified showed progress."

'Expands rights'

Seventy-four percent of the electorate participated in the referendum. Of those who voted, over two-thirds of Cubans said "yes" to the updated code. This is despite a concerted "no" campaign by religious and social conservatives and foreign actors.

The new code is "very progressive," said Rodríguez. "It expands rights; it doesn't take away from anybody. It is an act of justice for many people."

Diplomatic personnel then outlined some of the key points of the new Code of Families and how it was achieved.

They said Cuban and Latin American identity was central to the process of shaping the new code. Family laws throughout the hemisphere were reviewed and pulled from – even U.S. case law.

The guiding idea is that family plurality, diversity and human dignity are at the center of the Cuban Revolution. The code has an educational and pedagogical nature.

The definition of a family is now based on affection and emotional ties rather than blood relations, something new in the country's history.

It is a "code of freedom" to choose the form of family that works best for its members. It's a comprehensive code – one of the most advanced laws in the world.

Included in the Code of Families:

- Protection of all forms of families with no discrimination;
- The parental relationship is based on responsibilities and duties;
- The rights of children and youth, elders and the disabled to independence, dignity, accessibility and respect;
- Consequences for violence or other abuse in family situations;
- Equality of marriage and common law unions;
- Gender equality, including for transgender and nonbinary Cubans;
- Equality of rights in adoption and technologically assisted methods like in vitro fertilization;
- Duty to contribute to the family and the value of domestic labor;
- Institutional and community responsibility to uphold these rights.
- 'Did not happen overnight'

In response to an audience question about overcoming ingrained sexist and homophobic attitudes, Cuba's Deputy Foreign Minister Carlos Fernández de Cossío explained that the development of consciousness "did not happen overnight.

"Cuban society has developed greatly over the last 60 years. We have had equal pay for women and men since the 1960s and non-discrimination in education. The process of popular consultation of the last few years has helped, of course."

Fernández continued: "Cuba's practice has been to submit changes affecting all of society to popular approval since Fidel proclaimed the socialist character of the revolution. The discussion of the Code of Families was not an exception – it is the practice."

Speakers explained how the process of consultations was carried out through popular assemblies where experts and members of affected groups explained the aims of the various provisions. From there, "The whole society discussed the proposals in homes, workplaces and mass organizations."

More than 4,000 proposals were made in the assemblies, many of which were incorporated into the final document. For example, a provision clarifying inheritance rights for same-sex marriages was incorporated from one of these discussions.

In all, the new Code of Families went through 26 revisions before the final vote. Even as late as the 25th draft, there were 255 amendments.

The discussions exposed a generational divide on issues of sexuality and gender, parental responsibility, and children's rights, and young people were key to educating and winning over their elders.

In conclusion, Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez said: "We have to keep working hard. We have to deal every day with the 30% who voted against [the new code] and build more consensus in society."

Estela Vazquez, a retired leader of 1199 SEIU United Healthcare Workers, summed it up: "This is an incredible achievement – changing the legacy of 500 years of slavery, colonialism and neocolonialism."

Cuban leader Mariela Castro Espín on 'progressive conquest of new rights'

Mariela Castro Espín *Jan. 26, 2023*

Video message from Mariela Castro Espín, director of Cuba's National Center for Sex Education (Cenesex) and deputy of the National Assembly of Popular Power, to the webinar "What We Can Learn from Cuba's ' Code of Freedom' for Families," hosted by Women In Struggle/ Mujeres En Lucha on Jan. 22.

Greetings to all, I am Mariela Castro.

There are two main milestones in the Cuban Revolution regarding family law. One was the Family Code approved in 1975, which also went through a process of popular consultation and was taken to a referendum.

This code allowed for instituting important values that are being promoted in Cuban society for equal rights between men and women, especially in family life, in the equitable distribution of educational tasks and household chores, to begin to erode that patriarchal heritage of the sexual division of labor.

That code played a very important role and was considered one of the most advanced in the world at that time. Still a heteropatriarchal code, in some aspects, and hetero-normative specifically, yet not much more could be asked of Cuban society at that stage.

Education and scientific development, especially in the field of legal and social sciences and humanities, led to strengthening of Cuban culture regarding the family and family law. Progress was made regarding the rights of women.

All of this is reflected at a statistical level, as Cuba ranks second in the world for women parliamentarians: 53% of the Cuban parliament consists of women. There is an increasing presence of women in the National Assembly of Popular Power at leadership levels. Cuban women predominate in the sciences and there are several sectors of Cuban society at a professional level where the presence of women is increasingly greater.

In Cuba, there is respect for women, but the society is still patriarchal. Although the patriarchy has been eroded and weakened by the advances of our Revolution, there is significant resistance, and that creates challenges for us.

After 47 years of the Family Code being in force with all the new elements that were incorporated, the laws in which Cuba subscribed and committed itself as a state, laws in the field of international law, in the field of Human Rights, everything that our Revolution was advancing, it was already necessary to update that code.

But it began first, with the reform of the country's economic and social development strategy with the participation of the people with their criteria, with their criticisms and their proposals. From there, it went on to the constitutional reform, which was a substantial reform of 2019 approved in April 2019, also subject to specialized consultation, popular consultation and referendum with a very high turnout. 87% of the population approved that constitution in which the rights of LGBT people were already protected, important paths were opened, for example, for what they call equal marriage, but also to strengthen greater protection for sexual health and reproductive, sexual and reproductive rights.

'Heart, intelligence and wisdom of our people'

There are many other elements of the 2022 Families Code that you will be able to read on this valuable document that some consider to be the most advanced in the world, that is, international experts consider it to be so.

Mariela Castro Espín, director of Cuba's National Center for Sex Education (Cenesex) and deputy of the National Assembly of Popular Power. Photo taken at Cuba's annual March Against Homophobia and Transphobia in 2017.

But this code, like the constitution, was written with the heart, intelligence and wisdom of our people. And so this is also called the heartfelt code because the bonds of affection are given precedence over the straitjacket of biological bonds.

This is truly very significant, despite the opposition of some religious groups and particularly the Catholic Church, to prevent the advances of the Revolution in the progressive conquest of new rights. This has truly been achieved with the participation of our people in reaching a widely accepted code, although it was the first in which there were 33% negative votes.

But that's fine. It shows the resistance that still exists regarding these issues and all the challenges that they generate for us to continue transforming awareness that will allow us to create an active citizenry regarding the need for social and subjective transformations for achieving an increasingly just and equitable society.

The transition to socialism is complex and individual awareness is always in the rearguard. And this is what has been happening. That is the

significance. Our people have approved a constitution and a very advanced family code within the context of a socialist society of rights and social justice.

I am very satisfied with the result, but I also feel the responsibility that we still have to continue advancing to permanently educate and communicate all the elements based on science that help provide elements of analysis to monitor and evaluate the application of this new legislation in family law.

I thank you very much for your interest in this issue, and I invite you to read this valuable document that has been the result of building consensus for the 47 years that the previous code lasted. This is the importance it has, how our society is advancing by becoming more aware and moving towards a much more conscientious culture regarding the issues that this code deals with.

Thank you very much for your interest and warm greetings. Until we meet again.

La dirigente cubana Mariela Castro Espín sobre la 'conquista progresiva de nuevos derechos'

Por Mariela Castro Espín

Mensaje en vídeo de Mariela Castro Espín, directora del Centro Nacional de Educación Sexual (Cenesex) de Cuba y diputada de la Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular, al seminario web "Lo que podemos aprender del "Código de Libertad" de Cuba para las familias", organizado por Mujeres en Lucha/ el 22 de enero.

Hola compañeras, reciban un saludo cordial, soy Mariela Castro.

Quiero comentarles que hay dos hitos principales en la revolución cubana respecto al derecho familiar. Uno fue el código de familia aprobado en 1975, que además fue un proceso también de consulta popular y se llevó a referéndum. Un código que además permitió instituir ya valores importantes que se estaban promocionando en la sociedad cubana para la igualdad de derechos entre los hombres y las mujeres, sobre todo en la vida familiar, en la distribución equitativa de las tareas educativas, de las tareas del hogar. Un poco para empezar a erosionar esa herencia patriarcal de la división sexual del trabajo.

Ese código jugó un papel muy importante. Se consideró uno de los más avanzados del mundo en esa época. Un código heteropatriarcal todavía en algunos aspectos y hetero normativos específicamente. Pero ya a la sociedad cubana no se le podía pedir mucho más en esa etapa.

El trabajo de educación, el desarrollo científico, sobre todo en el campo de las ciencias jurídicas, de las ciencias sociales y humanísticas, llevaron a que también la sociedad cubana adquiriera una cultura mucho más sólida en el campo de la familia y en el campo del derecho familiar. Pero también todo lo que se avanzó respecto a los derechos de las mujeres y todo lo que

incluso se refleja a nivel estadístico, porque Cuba tiene el segundo lugar a nivel mundial de mujeres parlamentarias: el 53% del parlamento cubano está integrado por mujeres. Nuestra Asamblea Nacional de Poder Popular, en niveles de dirección hay cada vez más presencia de mujeres. En el campo científico cubano predominan las mujeres, y hay varios sectores de la sociedad cubana a nivel profesional donde la presencia de las mujeres cada vez más alta.

Así que en Cuba hay un respeto por las mujeres; pero todavía, el patriarcado, aunque ha sido erosionado y debilitado por los avances de nuestra Revolución, realmente todavía hace resistencias importantes y eso nos genera desafíos.

Después de 47 años de vigencia del Código de familia y todos los elementos nuevos que se fueron incorporando, las leyes en las que Cuba se suscribía y se comprometía como estado, leyes en el campo del derecho internacional, en el campo de los Derechos Humanos, todo lo que iba avanzando nuestra Revolución, ya era necesario actualizar ese código.

Pero se empezó por la reforma primero, de la estrategia de desarrollo económico y social del país con la participación del pueblo con sus criterios, con sus críticas y sus propuestas. De ahí se pasó a la reforma constitucional que fue una reforma sustancial de 2019 aprobada en abril de 2019, también sometida a consulta especializada, consulta popular y llevada referéndum con una participación altísima. El 87% de la población aprobó esa constitución en la que ya se blindaban los derechos de las personas LGBT, se abrían caminos importantes por ejemplo, para lo que le llaman el matrimonio igualitario, pero también para fortalecer la mayor protección a la salud sexual y reproductiva, los derechos sexuales y reproductivos.

Hay muchos otros elementos que ustedes podrán leer en este documento tan valioso que hay quienes consideran el más avanzado del mundo. Expertos internacionales lo consideran así. Pero además, un código que al igual que la Constitución, fue escrito con el corazón, con la inteligencia y la sabiduría de nuestro pueblo.

Se le llama también el Código de los Afectos porque se ponderan los vínculos afectivos por encima de esa camisa de fuerza que existía de los vínculos biológicos.

Realmente esto tiene un significado muy grande porque a pesar de la oposición de algunos grupos religiosos y particularmente la Iglesia Católica a evitar los avances de la Revolución en la conquista progresiva de nuevos derechos, realmente se logró con la participación de nuestro pueblo, llegar a un código ampliamente aceptado aunque fue el primero que en el que hubo un 33% de votos negativos. Pero está bien, eso demuestra la resistencia que todavía existe en relación con estos temas, y todos los desafíos que nos generan para seguir transformando las conciencias, que nos permitan generar una ciudadanía activa con relación a las necesidades de transformaciones sociales y transformaciones subjetivas para hacer una sociedad cada vez más justa y equitativa.

El proceso de transición al socialismo es complejo y las conciencias siempre avanzan de manera más rezagada. Y esto es lo que ha estado sucediendo. Ese es el significado que tiene. Nuestro pueblo aprobó una constitución y un código de las familias muy avanzado dentro del contexto de sociedad socialista de derechos y Justicia social.

Me siento muy satisfecha con el resultado, pero también siento la responsabilidad que todavía tenemos de seguir avanzando para educar y comunicar de manera permanente todos los elementos basados en la ciencia que ayuden a aportar elementos de análisis para monitorear y evaluar cómo va la aplicación de esta nueva legislación en la regulación del derecho familiar.

Muchas gracias por su interés en el tema. Les invito a leer este documento tan valioso que ha sido el resultado de la construcción de consensos durante los 47 años que duró el código anterior. Y esa es la importancia que tiene., cómo nuestra sociedad está avanzando en la adquisición de conciencia y de una cultura mucho más rigurosa con relación a los temas que este código trata.

Muchas gracias por su interés y reciban un afectuoso saludo; hasta la próxima.

Photo: Minrex

Hoy, Cuba celebra el Día Internacional Contra la Homofobia, la Transfobia y la Biofobia. #AmorEsLey #SanCristóbal #Artemisa

May 17, 2023, Cuba celebrated the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biophobia

End the U.S. economic war against the Cuban people!

Cheryl LaBash *Jan. 26, 2023*

Talk given by Cheryl LaBash, co-chair of the National Network On Cuba (NNOC), at the webinar "What We Can Learn from Cuba's 'Code of Freedom' for Families," hosted by Women In Struggle/Mujeres En Lucha on Jan. 22.

Sixty years is a long time. But that is how long the United States government, led by both Democrats and Republicans, has waged an economic, financial and commercial war against the Cuban people.

Even before that, the Eisenhower administration recognized that Fidel and the July 26th Movement – Raul, Che, Almeda, Camilo, Vilma, Haydée, Celia, Melba and so many more – would stay true to their promise: liberation, equality and sovereignty for all the Cuban people.

An April 6, 1960, State Department memo admitted the fact that the Cuban people supported the revolution. So it prescribed the path taken by the U.S. from then until today:

> "Every possible means should be undertaken to weaken the economic life of Cuba," the memo states. "If such a policy is adopted, it should be the result of a positive decision which would call forth a line of action which, while as adroit and inconspicuous as possible, makes the greatest inroads in denying money and supplies to Cuba, to decrease monetary and real wages, to bring about hunger, desperation and overthrow of the government."

Although the goal didn't change, the tactic did. On Dec. 17, 2014, President Obama and President Raul Castro agreed to begin a different road. President Obama even visited Cuba – and as a result many people wrongly believe the blockade ended then. Some things were eased, but behind it all, the coercive economic measures continued.

Then, in June 2017, President Trump declared he would return to the failed direction outlined by the State Department in 1960.

And then came the pandemic. Cuba had to close its main source of hard currency – tourism – and used its reserves to save lives, develop five COVID vaccines (three now in emergency use) and send its famous Henry Reeve Brigades to countries needing help against the pandemic.

U.S. uses pandemic as weapon

The United States saw its opportunity to use the pandemic as a weapon. Some 243 new measures were implemented to block any financial possibilities for Cuba. Surely the Cuban people would be desperate enough to embrace capitalist landlords, bankers and bosses.

Then as a parting shot, after the 2020 Biden election, Cuba was again declared a "State Sponsor of Terrorism." Certainly an insult as well as an injury to Cuba.

Although President Biden has been in office two years, he has done virtually nothing to lift the pressure on the Cuban people. The SSOT can be lifted with a letter from Biden!

Instead, we have been inundated with propaganda about "human rights" to justify turning back the changes made by the Obama administration in 2014-2015.

There is no alternative truth. Cuba is not a state sponsor of terrorism, but has been targeted by terrorist acts organized and financed in the U.S. The intensified blockade has hurt Cuban families on both sides of the Florida straits. For three years, Cubans in Miami have said "end the blockade" in the streets every month.

And it hurts farmers, workers and ordinary people in the U.S., too. Cuba has developed medical treatments that make 70% of diabetic amputations unnecessary, and a lung cancer vaccine that prolongs the quality of life of patients.

Guess what? The U.S. categories of "legal" travel to Cuba do not include medical treatment. It's the only country in the world where U.S. travelers need to declare a U.S. government designated category.

Elected bodies representing more than 44 million residents from California to Connecticut, from Montana to Michigan to Alabama, have called for the blockade to end, including city councils and labor organizations,

school boards and county commissions. Find out how to get local resolutions where you live.

The last weekend of every month, caravans are held to end the blockade in Miami and cities across the U.S. and around the world. Make a sign with hashtag #UnblockCuba and #OFFtheList.

Participate in the U.S.-Cuba Normalization Conference March 11-12 or the May Day Brigade.

Stay in touch with the National Network On Cuba on social media.
Web: NNOC.org; Facebook.com/CubaNetwork;
Instagram: NationalNetwork4Cuba; Twitter: @NNOCuba.

A Cuban family in October 2022.

Sixty years is too long. This campaign needs you to act now.

‘People in the U.S. have a lot to learn from Cuba’s Families Code’

Gloria Verdieu *Jan. 28, 2023*

Talk by Gloria Verdieu of the Prisoners Solidarity Committee at the webinar “What We Can Learn from Cuba’s ‘Code of Freedom’ for Families,” hosted by Women In Struggle/Mujeres En Lucha on Jan. 22.

I remember my first trip to socialist Cuba in November 2000. I attended the Second World Meeting of Friendship and Solidarity. I have the poster that was given to all participants. It has a quote from José Martí: “The world is a beautiful temple where all men on earth fit in peace.”

I knew then and I know now that “all men” translates to “all of humanity.” We can all fit in peace on this beautiful earth – our home.

The reason I went on this trip was that I wanted to see what socialism looked like.

The conference was attended by people from over 60 countries condemning the U.S. blockade. I came with a delegation; buses took us to the many programs on our packed schedule. We visited factories, polyclinics and communities, where we learned about the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs). There were cultural performances in these communities.

The daily events gave the delegates a chance to experience what life is like with a government that is concerned with the needs of the people rather than profits.

The delegates gathered daily at the Karl Marx Theater, within walking distance of our hotel. When I went walking, I did not feel any restrictions, though I did not wander too far.

We didn’t know if President Fidel Castro would speak at any of the con-

ference gatherings. I figured not – with thousands of people there, it would be a big security risk.

During our final meeting at the Karl Marx Theater, Fidel appeared on the stage. No bulletproof glass barriers, no extra security checks that I was aware of.

Fidel began to speak; we were given devices for interpretation. People listened and listened until it was time for discussion. Fidel gave lengthy, thoughtful answers to questions, not only from the delegates, but from Cuban workers.

At one point a child ran on stage and Fidel gave him a hug and said something that I could tell was a show of affection for him and his family.

Health care in Cuba vs. U.S.

One of the many things that had an impact on me was when we visited one of the polyclinics.

There was a group of doctors at the clinic, and one explained to us how closely connected doctors are with the communities they serve. They know who smokes, drinks, takes drugs (prescribed or not), struggles with mental illness, which teenagers are sexually active – intimate details that individuals voluntarily share with their doctors. Doctors know the health of families in their community through home visits and family counseling.

Doctors were told things that we in the U.S. would not dare tell our primary health care provider, because it could mean higher monthly costs for those who have insurance coverage, or changing health care providers, which means transferring all your health history to another doctor. You can be denied coverage or even lose your job because of a chronic health issue.

Health care is a huge problem in the U.S. There have been many reforms, many updates to the system, and yet there are still millions of people who have minimal or no health insurance.

I continue to learn what socialism looks like and how participatory democracy works. I was impressed with the way Cubans at home and abroad were involved in the decision-making process of updating Cuba's Families Code. Some 6.5 million people participated, a sincere display of democratic centralism.

As an organizer of the Struggle for Socialism Party's Prisoners Solidarity Committee, one of the many things that registered with me in Cuba's new Families Code is its promise to promote happy, healthy families. Everyone is included (great-grandparents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, in-laws, close partners), from the most senior members to the youngest, and everyone in between. You choose your family.

It also promotes the right to a family life free from violence and unprovoked stress. A family life that values love, affection, solidarity and responsibility.

I recently attended a day of solidarity with formerly incarcerated prisoners and families in California's capital, Sacramento. So many things are wrong with the "criminal justice system" in the U.S., which is why we know that it cannot be reformed or updated; we must shut it down.

You can see and feel the grief and stress of the families with loved ones in prison, and of those recently released, who are having a difficult time transitioning to life outside. Housing, healthcare, jobs and community acceptance are some of the obstacles that formerly incarcerated individuals face.

There are over 2 million people in prison in the U.S. Many more are detained in immigration centers and holding cells awaiting litigation, affecting millions of families.

Cuba: 'We encourage family to stay involved'

Gerardo Hernández, who was one of the Cuban 5 political prisoners held in the U.S., and is now head of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, highlighted the differences for families in Cuba: "Our purpose is to help. We talk with the family, we encourage the family to stay involved, because it is understood that the family suffers when a loved one is incarcerated.

"Prisoners need not be discriminated against because they went to jail. Our objective is not to make a repressive action against those persons but to help those persons, who are victims themselves in many cases."

Cuba's neighborhood CDRs number 138,000, with over 8 million members, and continue to work on programs and solutions to the problems of petty crime, drugs and mental illness.

The United States incarcerates more of its youth than any other country in the world. Most states continue to use outdated and harmful "training school" models, confining children in remote, prison-like facilities cut off from their families and communities.

Overcrowding and violence, prosecution of youths as adults, and the long-term consequences of incarceration on the individual's chances for success in adulthood are huge controversies.

President Miguel Diaz-Canel stated, "before our people and the world, that in Cuba no one under 16 years of age is imprisoned!"

People in the U.S. have a lot to learn from Cuba's Families Code, especially from the process in which it was passed. All citizens over 16 years of age were eligible to vote in the Families Code referendum.

We must support Cuba by demanding the U.S. government end the more than 60-year blockade and remove Cuba from the so-called "State Sponsors of Terrorism" list. We must demand normalization of relations and an open dialog with Cuba.

We must learn about socialism and Cuba's participatory democracy. Socialism is the path to a better world for everyone.

‘Indigenous communities are fighting to keep our families together’

Mahtowin Munro *Jan. 30, 2023*

Talk given by Mahtowin Munro of United American Indians of New England (UAINE) at the webinar “What We Can Learn from Cuba’s ‘Code of Freedom’ for Families,” hosted by Women In Struggle/Mujeres En Lucha on Jan. 22.

The new Families Code is an incredible achievement of the Cuban people, born out of thousands of hours of discussions and a desire to ensure that ideas and policies properly reflect what families should have at this historic time in their socialist system.

I contrast what Cuba has with what we have in the U.S. – or perhaps I should say, what we don’t have. I will largely speak about this from an Indigenous family perspective, but we know that conditions are also abysmal for other oppressed and marginalized communities.

Because I have been to Cuba, I know that there are many supports for families there, with daycare and health care right there in their communities. Housing is a right, whereas here, there are many thousands of unhoused children – more than 100,000 in New York City alone.

In Cuba, families are supported, and the children are treated with great care, and this is reflected in the confidence of the children themselves and the extension of key rights through the Families Code.

Here in the U.S., children are criminalized as part of the school-to-prison pipeline. Many thousands of children, disproportionately children of color, are detained, disciplined at schools, and subjected to harsh discipline. Some of these children are as young as kindergarten age.

In the U.S., it can be hard to even have a family. Back in the 1970s, it was revealed that the U.S. government was sterilizing Indigenous women, Puerto Rican women, and Black women without their consent.

It can also be hard to choose not to have a family. This is true not only because of Roe v. Wade being overturned. For instance, the Indian Health Service, upon which many Indigenous people rely, does not provide abortion services. So Native child-bearers must overcome substantial hurdles in order to get the services they need.

Indigenous, Black, and other women of color are less likely to have the prenatal care that they need as well. In addition, maternal mortality and infant mortality rates are much higher in Black and Indigenous communities than for white people.

Boarding schools = concentration camps

The attacks on Indigenous families have been severe and have endured for generations. These attacks are not accidental but are key features of settler colonialism and capitalism. Because settlers and the U.S. government have been dedicated to stealing Indigenous lands and extracting resources from the lands, Indigenous families and communities have been shattered in many ways in order to weaken ties to the land and to make it easier to steal and exploit even more land and resources. These attacks are meant to destroy our spirits and cultures, break our communities, and break our ties to the land.

The Indian boarding schools that were established in Canada and the U.S. in the latter part of the 1800s were very much part of consolidating these attacks that had been occurring since invasion. The Canadian and U.S. governments worked hand in hand with churches to fill the seats at these schools.

While some Indigenous families were persuaded that their children would be better off at the schools, many families were coerced and told that they would not receive their rations if they did not let their children be removed, at a time of starvation when many Indigenous people were denied the right to hunt and fish on their own homelands. Many children were forced to attend these schools, even at the point of being kidnapped from their home communities.

Once at the schools, which in reality were not schools but concentration camps for kids and instruments of genocide, children were stripped

Protesters defend the Indian Child Welfare Act outside the U.S. Supreme Court, Nov. 9, 2022.

of their clothing and put into uniforms, had their hair cut off, were beaten for speaking their own tribal languages, and were physically and sexually abused on a routine basis.

In some of the schools, children were not allowed to return home at all for years. When they became older and went back home, they often no longer felt they belonged and could not even speak their own language. Children died at these so-called schools by the thousands.

These institutions did not close until the 1960s and, in some cases, later than that. In the U.S. and Canada, there have been recent efforts by Indigenous people to speak the truth about what happened at these institutions, to demand reparations, to talk about the resulting intergenerational trauma, and to begin the very hard work of trying to find and identify unmarked graves at these schools.

Far from being over, the attacks on Indigenous families continued. By the 1970s, about a third of Native children in the U.S. had been taken from their families and adopted, usually by non-Native families, where they grew up without knowing who they were.

ICWA under attack

Following a huge effort by tribes and individuals, the Indian Child Welfare Act was passed in 1978 and was intended to keep Native children in Native communities.

However, the ICWA is now under attack. Right-wing think tanks like the Goldwater Institute, evangelicals, and funding from energy companies have led to a case now before the Supreme Court that would and may overturn ICWA.

Indigenous children are also much more likely to be in foster care, with many hurdles existing before their families can get the children returned.

There are many more attacks against our families, including the ongoing epidemic of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and Two Spirit people in the U.S., Canada, Mexico, and elsewhere. In the U.S., at least 84% of Native women have experienced violence. While the government and police often say that this is due to the violence of Native men, in fact, it is non-Natives who commit the vast majority of this violence.

Native women are murdered at a rate of 10 times the national average. The rates in urban areas, where the majority of Native people live, are also disproportionately high. Indigenous women hold families and cultures together. When one of them is attacked, disappears, or is killed, the impact is shattering.

This is not a new issue, but rather is part of the ongoing violence against all Indigenous peoples that first began when Europeans arrived.

The violence against Indigenous women, Two Spirit people and children has deep roots in the invasion and colonization of Indigenous homelands and in white supremacy, marginalization, and poverty. The violence is a mechanism of domination and oppression. It is intended to terrorize, disrupt and demoralize Indigenous populations. It is a direct function of white supremacy, settler colonialism, and capitalism.

But Indigenous communities throughout the Americas have been fighting back and are continuing to do everything possible to keep our families together, strengthen our communities, and defend the land and water.

'Struggle against sexual and gender violence goes hand in hand with struggle for decolonization'

Berta Joubert-Ceci *Jan. 28, 2023*

Remarks by Berta Joubert-Ceci of Mujeres En Lucha/Women In Struggle at the webinar "What We Can Learn from Cuba's 'Code of Freedom' for Families" on Jan. 22.

Buenas tardes compañeras y compañeros,

First, I wanted to thank Mariela Castro for taking the time to record this message. Because as we know, part of the effect of the U.S. blockade against Cuba is that the application Zoom cannot be used there.

As a member of Mujeres En Lucha/Women In Struggle, which is a member organization of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF or FDIM in Spanish), I also wanted to acknowledge the fact that Mariela's mother, Vilma Espín, was instrumental in saving the FDIM after the dismemberment of the European socialist countries.

At that time, Vilma was vice president while the FDIM headquarters was in Berlin. And it was her swift action of saving documents and materials from that office, securing them, that preserved the FDIM from extinction.

Compañeres, this topic is also very pertinent to our process in Puerto Rico. As a colony of the U.S., we suffer in greater degree some of the ills that affect the U.S. Violence against women and LGBTQ+ people have been on the rise, including against children. This has been fueled by a rising wave of fundamentalist religious sectors that affect the government's actions and policies and seem to be a copy and paste of what happens in the U.S.

So, for us here, the struggle against sexual and gender violence has to go hand in hand with the struggle for decolonization, for independence.

But as the poem of Lola Rodríguez de Tió says, "Cuba y PR son, de un pájaro las dos alas," "Cuba and Puerto Rico are wings of the same bird." We can look up to Cuba's development and Families Code as an inspiration.

We hope to fulfill here in PR what is expressed in the introduction of the new Cuban Families Code: "The emancipatory conception of the family that guides the transformation of Cuban socialist society intertwines social interest and personal interest, promotes its development, contributes to the formation of the new generations and satisfies deep human, affective and social interests of the person."

Cuba's Families Code shows: Queer people need a socialist revolution!

Melinda Butterfield *Jan. 26, 2023*

Talk given by Melinda Butterfield, Struggle-La Lucha co-editor, at the webinar "What We Can Learn from Cuba's 'Code of Freedom' for Families," hosted by Women In Struggle/Mujeres En Lucha on Jan. 22.

Good afternoon siblings, friends, and comrades.

It's an honor to follow the beautiful message of solidarity from Comrade Mariela Castro Espín. The organization she leads, Cuba's National Center for Sex Education (Cenesex), just celebrated its 35th anniversary, a tremendous milestone for the Cuban people and all progressive peoples of the world.

Marking the anniversary, the Transcuba Nacional organization said that Cenesex has "developed important research and contributions in the sciences that have aided the development of Cuban society in terms of sexual rights. It has educated and trained professionals and activists who bring about social transformations around the realities of human sexuality. The particular attention paid to trans people has made Cenesex a home of respect, love and inclusion."

What a contrast to the situation that queer people, especially trans people, face here in the United States in 2023!

Have you heard of Christynne Lili Wrene Wood? She is a retired African American city worker in Santee, a suburb of San Diego. This trans woman has become one of the latest targets of the anti-trans panic that has swept the country since last year.

On Dec. 29, Christynne was finishing up her weekly water aerobics class at the local YMCA. She showered and changed in the women's locker room as she always does. But that day, she was targeted for a transphobic attack. A 17-year-old girl was put up before the media afterward, claim-

ing she was "traumatized" by seeing someone with "male genitalia" in the women's changing area.

Trans women are women, regardless of what genitalia they have. None of the women who regularly participate in water aerobics with Christynne had an issue changing with her. But the fact is, Christynne has had gender reassignment surgery, so she could not have been mistaken for having "male genitalia."

Christynne Lili Wrene Wood

It was a set-up for the far-right crusade to demonize trans people. The lie was repeated by Tucker Carlson and other fascist mouthpieces. A hate rally was staged outside the Santee YMCA last week. Christynne had to listen to these lies being repeated as she counter-protested with supporters across the street.

Christynne explained to a reporter: "There's a movie out right now about how that kind of a lie and hysteria can lead to tragedy. The movie's about Emmett Till. The lies of a person got that child beat to death and that's just the kind of group [here] that would love to pull a stunt like that. Thank God, I've got protection and people with me that see to it that I don't suffer that kind of pain. But don't you think that there aren't people over there right now that would love to come over and rip me [apart] piece [by] piece?"

Since the beginning of this year – in just three weeks – more than 150 pieces of anti-LGBTQ2S legislation have been introduced in states across this country, primarily aimed at criminalizing trans lives. This includes bills to cut off all gender-affirming health care for adults as well as youth and to essentially make it illegal for trans people to exist in public.

Doctors and children's hospitals are threatened with bombings. Neo-Nazis attempt to shut down drag events, aided by local cops. Parents who support their trans kids are threatened with prosecution.

What are the supposed friends of the LGBTQ2S community in Washington doing to stop this? Not a damn thing. They tell us to vote for them, the way they told women to vote for them before standing aside and letting abortion rights be stripped away. Meanwhile, supposed liberals like Hillary

Clinton and the New York Times are joining in the anti-trans rhetoric, showing that this attack goes far beyond the Trumpist right.

The Biden administration and Congress have made it crystal clear that their priority is funding wars for empire on the other side of the world and continuing the six-decades-long illegal blockade of Cuba – not protecting the rights of people here.

That's why it's so important for queer people and all workers to learn from Cuba's example.

Here are some highlights of the new Families Code Cubans approved last September:

- Protection of all forms of families, including chosen families, with no discrimination;
- The parental relationship is based on responsibilities and duties;
- The rights of children and youth, elders and the disabled to independence, dignity, accessibility, and respect;
- Consequences for violence or other abuse in family situations;
- Equality of marriage and common law unions;
- Gender equality, including for trans and nonbinary Cubans;
- Equality of rights in adoption and technologically assisted methods like in vitro fertilization;
- Duty to contribute to the family and recognition of the value of domestic labor;
- Institutional and community responsibility to uphold these rights.

The guiding idea of the document is that family plurality, diversity, and human dignity are at the center of the Cuban Revolution. The definition of a family is now based on affection and emotional ties rather than blood relations. It's a "code of freedom" to choose the form of family that works best for its members.

I attended an event at the Cuban Mission to the United Nations, where diplomats talked about the new Families Code and answered questions. Two things really jumped out at me. One was the genuine pride the Cuban comrades had for this accomplishment. The other was the number of peo-

ple from nonprofits and legal services representing trans and queer communities here, who were desperate to learn how Cuba was able to accomplish this at a time when our rights are being mercilessly rolled back.

The diplomats explained the years-long process of consultations held throughout all of society, from neighborhoods and workplaces to mass organizations; how there were 25 drafts incorporating thousands of amendments suggested at these discussions. They talked about the decisive role of young people in arguing for updating the country's family code to be more inclusive and how they won their elders over to support the referendum.

And they talked about how this was not something that happened out of the blue – it was built up throughout the whole history of the Cuban Revolution, for more than 60 years – the struggle against patriarchy and the vestiges of capitalism and colonialism in everyday life.

This last point is very important. It was a diplomatic event, so the Cubans couldn't put too fine a point on it, but the essential thing is this: The Cuban people made a socialist revolution. And LGBTQ2S people in the U.S. need a socialist revolution here to secure our rights.

The U.S. ruling class has decided to go all in on scapegoating trans people. But they won't stop with us. The broader LGBTQ2S community is next on the chopping block.

The capitalist system is based on the principle of divide and rule. A historic struggle like the Stonewall Rebellion can shake society and win important reforms. But as long as capitalism exists, those gains are always in danger of being taken away. To truly secure our rights to equality, to decent jobs, to housing, education, and health care for all – including gender-affirming care – we need what Cuba has: a socialist revolution.

It's time for the LGBTQ2S movement, and all people's movements, to reject the losing strategy of relying on the Democratic Party and capitalist electoral politics. We need a return to the militant struggles of Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, of ACT UP and Queer Nation, and of Leslie Feinberg. And while we do that, we need to keep our eyes on the prize: replacing divide-and-conquer capitalism with a society based on solidarity that puts people's needs first.

How the Cuban government and its people collaborated on the Family Code

Natalia Marques *March 23, 2023*

This article was produced in partnership by Peoples Dispatch and Globetrotter. Natalia Marques is a writer at Peoples Dispatch, an organizer, and a graphic designer based in New York City.

On September 25, 2022, Cuba passed one of the world's most progressive codes on families. All in one go, the small island nation legalized same-sex marriage, defined and upheld the rights of children, the disabled, caregivers, and the elderly, and redefined "family" along ties of affinity rather than blood. This opens the concept of "family" to include nontraditional forms of familial relations, which exist outside the model of the heterosexual nuclear family.

Hailed as "revolutionary" by many in Cuba, the code will help provide protections to people who would have otherwise faced discrimination in society while ensuring that Cubans in same-sex relationships who wish to marry now have the legal right to do so.

According to young Cubans and social movement leaders, whom I spoke to about the Family Code while attending a conference titled "Building Our Future" in Havana in November 2022, the code is a reflection of a dialogue between the Cuban people and their government.

In the time since the code was passed, the Cuban government remains in dialogue with the people. The Ministry of Justice is still holding seminars in provinces throughout Cuba for people seeking answers to questions that have come up during the implementation process. The Family Code has been influencing everything from sports to property relations. Notably, in just the first two months of the law being passed, 112 same-sex marriages were registered.

A revolutionary code

"It's a revolutionary code that will change the thinking and the vision that Cubans have regarding… discriminations that can happen in society," said Jose Luiz, a third-year international relations student at the Higher Institute of International Relations Raul Roa García. The Family Code legalizes and broadens the definition of a "family" far beyond the traditional definition. The code "will bring new protections to people who have, in one way or another, been discriminated against," Luiz told me.

Cuba ratified a new constitution in 2019. The constitution was written through "popular consultations" with the Cuban people. Through this process, Cubans participated in community discussions with government officials to both discuss and amend the constitution. Article 68, which called for defining marriage as a union between two people, thus legalizing same-sex marriage, was mentioned in 66 percent of popular consultation meetings. A majority of the Cuban people involved in these processes supported maintaining the definition of marriage as being a union between a man and a woman. This is partly due to historic prejudices against LGBTQ+ people that are prevalent across the Americas, and partly due to Cuba's growing conservative evangelical movement, which opposes progressive social reforms such as same-sex marriage.

After intense debate regarding Article 68 among the Cuban people, the constitutional commission decided not to include the proposed language in favor of same-sex marriage and instead pushed the decision of addressing the matter through a future "family code" legislation. This legislation became the 2022 Family Code.

'Popular consultation': A government in dialogue with its people

In order to overcome social conservatism to pass one of the most progressive Family Codes in the world, Cuba underwent a meticulous process of popular consultation, from February 1, 2022, to April 30, 2022. The National Assembly of People's Power stressed the importance of Cubans familiarizing themselves with the code, in order to prevent feelings of uncertainty. Through this process, the Cuban people made more than 400,000 proposals, many of which were included in the finalized code. Minister of

Justice Oscar Manuel Silvera Martínez said that the 25th version of the code, presented to and approved by the National Assembly, "was more solid because it was imbued with the wisdom of the people."

Young people played a central role in the process leading up to the approval of the Family Code. "The Cuban youth… are involved in all tasks that are deployed by the Cuban revolution," said Luiz. "We also participated in our referendum for our constitution in 2019. We were in popular committees, discussing the constitution and we contributed to that."

In 2019, Cuba held a referendum on a new constitution. The referendum passed with a majority vote of 86.85 percent, which is about 73.3 percent of the total electorate. The referendum was preceded by a popular consultation process, in which a draft constitution was discussed in 133,000 public meetings nationwide, where the people of Cuba submitted 783,000 proposals for changes. Cuban officials stated that almost 60 percent of the draft constitution was modified based on the proposals submitted by the public during the popular consultation process.

"I remember at my college, we had meetings to explain the [Family Code], and for us as students to give our perspective of the code and propose something for the code," Neisser Liban Calderón García, also a Cuban international relations student, told me. "But after we did that at college, we had the same thing in our community, with a different perspective because at college we are with our friends, with [other] students; but in the community, we are with people from all ages and from different families." García, who has a boyfriend, told me that he is glad that he will now have the opportunity to marry in the future.

The results of this popular process speak for themselves: With 74.01 percent of eligible voters participating, the Family Code passed in a landslide victory with 66.87 percent of votes in favor.

"The day that… [the Cuban people] voted for the Family Code in the popular referendum, I also participated directly in the polling station," said Luiz. "I could see the high participation of the people in the process, and the high acceptance and eagerness for the approval of the code."

As Luiz mentioned, some young people had the opportunity to participate in an even more direct way. "Through the University Student

Federation [FEU], we have meetings with the leadership of the country. For example, my institute had a meeting with the president. And in that meeting, we described the vision we have as revolutionary and communist youths, the vision we have of the change that needs to happen regarding the base and the leaders of the country," Luiz said. "We have a voice [as youth] in every space that we have, including the president of FEU [who at the time was law student Karla Santana]. She is part of the National Assembly of People's Power in Cuba. And she shares her perspective with the Cuban government regarding the thinking of the youth and its tradition in the Cuban revolution."

Gretel Marante Roset, international relations officer for the Federation of Cuban Women, told me that the women of Cuba played a special role in the process of creating the Family Code. "Our commander in chief [Fidel Castro] said that the Federation of Cuban Women is a revolution within another revolution. Women in Cuba are beneficiaries and protagonists of our own development." Women hold half of all national parliamentary seats in Cuba.

"The Federation of Cuban Women was part of the commission writing the draft of the Family Code to propose the text and interpretation of gender equality," Marante Roset told me.

"About the Family Code, I think that the document is for the future. It is based on love… recognizing other types of families, joint human rights… I think that this is the future for Cuba," Marante Roset said.

'First on the Fifth': Marching with Cuba's Cenesex on a historic May Day

Melinda Butterfield *May 12, 2023*

Havana – May Day in Cuba. Nothing quite like it – even if it takes place a little later than expected.

Havana is renowned for its huge, colorful, and powerful marches every May 1, International Workers' Day. This year was already planned to be different. Because of severe fuel shortages caused by the U.S. blockade, it was decided to focus on local marches in Cuba's provinces and the various municipalities that make up Havana.

Then severe weather struck. Havana's May 1 celebrations had to be postponed. Instead, it was "the First on the Fifth" – the great workers' action was held on Friday, May 5, the 205th birthday of Karl Marx, the founder of scientific socialism.

Another difference: in an additional move to conserve fuel for urgent people's needs, the usual march through the Plaza of the Revolution was changed to a mass rally along the Malecón, Havana's famous sea wall.

I arrived in Cuba from New York City on May 3 to attend the VII International Colloquium on Trans Identities, Gender, and Culture, hosted by the National Center for Sex Education (Cenesex), together with Serena Sojic-Borne, a comrade from the New Orleans chapter of Freedom Road Socialist Organization.

Comrade Mariela Castro Espin, director of Cenesex, invited the international delegates from Mexico, Italy, the United States, and other countries to join the center's delegation in the May Day action, a proposal we gladly accepted.

Queer youth for socialism

In the U.S., it's impossible to imagine a city full of workers rising well before dawn to defend the system they live under. U.S. workers are exploited by their bosses, lied to by politicians, overworked and underpaid, without universal health care or the right to housing.

How different is Cuba! In Havana, workers from every sector, along with students and other organized groups, began gathering by 4 a.m. As the international delegates walked by the University of Havana, contingents of young people were already starting to arrive, chanting, singing, and drumming.

Across the wide boulevard, workers representing Radio Rebelde (founded by Che Guevara) and other media outlets were gathering around their banners.

As we reached the intersection where Cenesex was gathering, outside a movie theater, comrade Mariela Castro was among the first to arrive – greeting people, keeping the group motivated and excited. Organizers from TransCuba Nacional, the national network of trans women, distributed trans flags to the many young queer people as they arrived and kept folx from wandering too far afield.

At the intersection where we gathered, we witnessed young people organized by the Committees in Defense of the Revolution (CDRs) blocking streets and directing traffic away from the marchers. A CDR leader took time to snap some group photos of our contingent for Mariela.

SLL photo; Melinda Butterfield

May 5, Havana Cuba. Mariela Castro, seventh from left Joins celebration in Havana with a Pride banner.

'Love is the law'

The dozens of queer youth who gathered with Cenesex, a majority of them Black Cubans, carried an enormous rainbow flag and a lead banner that read, "Por todas las familias, el amor es ley" – "For all Cuban families, love is the law."

This refers to the revolutionary new Families Code approved last year, which expands the rights of all families, including LGBTQ+ families and chosen families. May is also the International Month Against Homophobia and Transphobia and is celebrated in Cuba much like Pride Month is in the U.S.

For Cenesex and the networks of trans, gay, lesbian, and bisexual people, this is a key time to educate the queer community and the broader Cuban public about the provisions of the new code.

As we marched down the wide, dark street toward the Malecón, more people streamed into the contingent at each intersection. We took our

place among the tens of thousands already gathered beside the sea, while revolutionary songs played over gigantic speakers that reached everyone in the rally.

Dozens of hands of all colors and gender expressions took hold of the massive Pride flag and shook it in time to beat. Beside the Cenesex group were health care workers' unions, unions of the economic ministry, parents holding small children on their shoulders, and portraits of Marti, Fidel, and Che, all awaiting the inspiring words of Ulises Guilarte, general secretary of the Cuban Workers Federation (CTC).

The beautiful sunrise over the sea slowly spread across the massive demonstration – a beautiful symbolic moment.

Together we sang, chanted, and celebrated the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, the achievements of socialism despite the punishing and illegal U.S. blockade, and the continuing struggles of the world's workers and oppressed.

Viva Cuba! El amor es ley!
U.S. Friends Against Homophobia and Transphobia delegation 2023

SEMIac Cuba *May 10, 2023*

The defense of their rights and the denunciation of religious and political fundamentalisms are common purposes shared by LGBTIQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer) activists from Cuba and the United States.

Representatives of the TransCuba Network, the Lesbian and Bisexual Women's Network, MSM (men who have sex with men) and LGBTQ activists from the United States exchanged on the approval of the Family Code in the Caribbean nation, the forms of activism and homolesbotransphobic violence.

The meeting was held on May 8 at the National Center for Sex Education (Cenesex), as part of the 16 Cuban Days against Homophobia and Transphobia, which are being held until May 20 in Havana and Santi Spíritus.

Melinda Butterfield, a trans activist with the U.S. organization "Women in Struggle," recalled her previous visits to the country, as she has been a member of the solidarity movement with Cuba for 30 years.

"I came before and after I transitioned. Now we have been motivated by the victory of the Family Code and we want to bring people from our communities to learn about this law and that, when they return, they can educate about the need to end the blockade on Cuba," said Butterfield.

The group of activists visiting Cuba was interested in the process of approval of the Family Code and how it attracted the support of the Cuban government.

"In the United States the government is against us; in different states, laws are being passed that seek to annihilate and eliminate us. That's why we're here, to learn how you have achieved all this," said lesbian activist Elizabeth Toledo of the Struggle for Socialism Party.

Gustavo Alberto Pi, a specialist from Cenesex, highlighted the support of the Cuban State as a crucial element in the process of approving the Code. A struggle that was not easy, he said.

"The approval of the Family Code is the result of political will and decades of education and awareness by institutions such as Cenesex and civil society," he explained.

"From a legal point of view, it is a beautiful document. It is not only the Code that recognizes the right to marriage and adoption by LGBTIQ people. It is a law that protects the rights of all people in society, particularly the most vulnerable, and settles a historical debt with homosexual and trans people," added Alberto Pi.

The group of visitors was also interested in the functioning and agenda of the existing collectives in Cuba, the spaces for socialization and the challenges that still persist.

Representatives of the TransCuba Network, the Lesbian and Bisexual Women's Network and MSM pointed out some of the issues they work on and the forms of organization of their collectives, present in all the provinces of the country and in most of their municipalities.

At the meeting, it was learned that, unlike TransCuba and MSM, the Lesbian and Bisexual Women's Network faces the challenge of not having its own budget.

"By not being considered a population at risk of HIV and sexually transmitted infections, lesbians are unable to access international funding dedicated to the prevention of the HIV epidemic," explained Alberto Pi.

Other challenges shared by activists from both countries were violence and religious fundamentalism, which in the case of the United States have seeped into politics and the media, increasing hate speech.

"There are many differences between the different states of the nation, in some they are taking away rights from LGBTIQ people and making it illegal to exist in public. In a few states we maintain our rights, because there is no national protection policy and the national government refuses to intervene," said Melinda Butterfield.

"Now there is a lot of hate in the media and that means more violence everywhere. New York, where I live, is considered a safe city, but fascists are coming into our spaces and as a community we have to stand up to them. In Florida and Texas it's worse," added the trans activist.

"Here we are also victims, especially trans people. We suffer police harassment, family abandonment and social discrimination; that often forces us to drop out of school, go to prostitution as a survival and most of us live with HIV," said Alexandra Hernández Naranjo, coordinator of TransCuba in the municipality of Habana del Este.

For her part, Teresa de Jesús Fernández, national coordinator of the Lesbian and Bisexual Women's Network, shared some of the points on the agenda developed by the Network, including: the approach to sexist violence, internalized lesbophobia, the recognition of lesbian families, the exercise of the reproductive rights of lesbian women, the visibility and reality of their rights, school, work and community bullying.

"Our fundamental objective is to contribute to the transformation of society and to dismantle patriarchy," concluded the activist.

Gustavo Alberto Pi, especialista del Cenesex, resaltó el apoyo del Estado cubano como elemento crucial en el proceso de aprobación del Código. Una lucha que no fue fácil, dijo.

"La aprobación del Código de las Familias es resultado de la voluntad política y de las décadas de educación y sensibilización por parte de instituciones como el Cenesex y la sociedad civil", explicó.

"Desde el punto de vista legal, es un documento precioso. No es solo el Código que reconoce el derecho al matrimonio y a la adopción por parte de las personas LGBTIQ. Es una ley que protege los derechos de todas las personas en la sociedad, en particular las más vulnerables, y salda una deuda histórica con las personas homosexuales y trans."

LGBTIQ activists exchange on struggles and challenges

Activistas LGBTIQ intercambian sobre luchas y desafíos

Por SEMlac Cuba May 10, 2023

La defensa de sus derechos y la denuncia de los fundamentalismos religiosos y políticos son propóstios comunes que comparten activistas LGBTIQ (lesbianas, gays, bisexuales, trans, intersex y queer) de Cuba y Estados Unidos.

Representantes de la Red TransCuba, la Red de Mujeres Lesbianas y Bisexuales, HSH (hombres que tienen sexo con otros hombres) y activistas LGBTQ de los Estados Unidos intercambiaron sobre la aprobación del Código de las Familias en la nación caribeña, las formas de organización del activismo y las violencias homolesbotransfóbicas.

El encuentro se realizó el 8 de mayo en el Centro Nacional de Educación Sexual (Cenesex), como parte de las 16 Jornadas Cubanas contra la Homofobia y la Transfobia, que se celebran hasta el próximo 20 de mayo en La Habana y Santi Spíritus.

Melinda Butterfield, activista trans de la organización estadounidense "Mujeres en lucha", recordó sus visitas anteriores al país, pues desde hace 30 años integra el movimiento de solidaridad con Cuba.

"Vine antes y después de hacer la transición. Ahora nos ha motivado la victoria del Código de las Familias y queremos traer a personas de nuestras comunidades para que aprendan sobre esta ley y que, al regresar, puedan educar sobre la necesidad de terminar con el bloqueo a Cuba", dijo Butterfield.

El grupo de activistas que visita Cuba se interesó por el proceso de aprobación del Código de las Familias y cómo concitó el apoyo del gobierno cubano.

"En Estados Unidos el gobierno está contra nosotros; en diferentes Estados se están aprobando leyes que buscan aniquilarnos y eliminarnos. Por eso estamos aquí, para aprender cómo ustedes han logrado todo esto", aseveró la activista lesbiana Elizabeth Toledo, del Partido de la Lucha por el Socialismo.

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"Desde el punto de vista legal, es un documento precioso. No es solo el Código que reconoce el derecho al matrimonio y a la adopción por parte de las personas LGBTIQ. Es una ley que protege los derechos de todas las personas en la sociedad, en particular las más vulnerables, y salda una deuda histórica con las personas homosexuales y trans", agregó Alberto Pi.

El grupo de visitantes también se interesó por el funcionamiento y la agenda de los colectivos existentes en Cuba, los espacios de socialización y los desafíos que aún persisten.

Representantes de la Red TransCuba, la Red de Mujeres Lesbianas y Bisexuales y HSH apuntaron algunos de los temas que trabajan y las formas de organización de sus colectivos, presentes en todas las provincias del país y en la mayoría de sus municipios.

En el encuentro trascendió que, a diferencia de TransCuba y HSH, la Red de Mujeres Lesbianas y Bisexuales enfrenta el desafío de no contar con presupuesto propio.

"Al no ser consideradas como población de riesgo ante el VIH e infecciones de transmisión sexual, las lesbianas no logran acceder a financiamientos internacionales dedicados a la prevención de la epidemia del VIH", explicó Alberto Pi.

Otros desafíos compartidos por activistas de ambos países fueron las violencias y los fundamentalismos religiosos, que en el caso de los Estados Unidos se han filtrado en la política y los medios de comunicación, incrementando el discurso de odio.

"Existen muchas diferencias entre los diferentes Estados de la nación, en algunos se les están quitando derechos a las personas LGBTIQ y haciendo que sea ilegal existir en público. En unos pocos Estados mantenemos nuestros derechos, pues no existe una política nacional de protección y el gobierno nacional se rehúsa a intervenir", contó Melinda Butterfield.

"Ahora existe mucho odio en los medios y eso significa más violencia en todos los lugares. Nueva York, donde vivo, es considerada una ciudad segura, pero los fascistas están yendo a nuestros espacios y como comunidad tenemos que hacerles frente. En Florida y Texas es peor", agregó la activista trans.

"Aquí también somos víctimas, sobre todo las personas trans. Sufrimos acoso policial, abandono familiar y discriminación social; eso nos obliga muchas veces a dejar los estudios, acudir a la prostitución como sobrevivencia y la mayoría vive con VIH", dijo Alexandra Hernández Naranjo, coordinadora de TransCuba en el municipio Habana del Este.

Por su parte, Teresa de Jesús Fernández, coordinadora nacional de la Red de Mujeres Lesbianas y Bisexuales, compartió algunos de los puntos de la agenda que desarrolla la Red, entre ellos: el abordaje de las violencias machistas, la lesbofobia interiorizada, el reconocimiento de las familias lesboparentales, el ejercicio de los derechos reproductivos de las mujeres lesbianas, la visibilidad y realidad de sus derechos, el acoso escolar, laboral y en la comunidad.

"Nuestro objetivo fundamental es contribuir a la transformación de la sociedad y a desmotar el patriarcado", concluyó la activista.

Cuban and U.S. LGBTQ+ activists have discussion at Cenesex headquarters in Havana.

Gustavo Alberto Pi, a specialist from Cenesex, highlighted the support of the Cuban State as a crucial element in the process of approving the Code. A struggle that was not easy, he said.

"The approval of the Family Code is the result of political will and decades of education and awareness by institutions such as Cenesex and civil society," he explained.

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U.S. LGBTQ+ delegation travels to Cuba to learn about new Families Code

Gregory E. Williams *May 10, 2023*

On May 8, the U.S. Friends Against Homophobia and Transphobia delegation, led by Women in Struggle – Mujeres en Lucha, met with Cuban activists at the National Center for Sex Education (Cenesex) headquarters in Havana. These activists represent multiple LGBTQ+ organizations, including TransCuba, La Red HSH (the Network of Men Who Have Sex with Men), and the Network of Lesbian and Bisexual Women in Cuba. These are autonomous organizations of people from these communities that work closely with Cenesex, which is under the Ministry of Health.

Before departing for Cuba, our delegation began learning about Cuba's revolutionary new Families Code. But it was incredible to be among these activists – to hear about their work, life experiences, and analysis of the ongoing revolutionary process in Cuba. These activists vividly conveyed how far Cuba has come, rising from a legacy of colonialism and patriarchal values, even while impeded by Washington's criminal blockade.

They were completely candid about problems of homophobia and transphobia in Cuba, with resistance to progressive change coming especially from the U.S.-funded evangelical movement. An activist with the Network of Lesbian and Bisexual Women in Cuba explained the problems with these reactionary forces, putting them in historical context. Nevertheless, these problems of backward mentalities in some people are not comparable to the neo-fascist attacks in the United States on LGBTQ+ people, women, people of color, and the working class more broadly. There is a stark difference between the social systems in the two countries, and this accounts for the difference in the political situation.

In the U.S., there is an imperialist capitalist class that can exist only so long as the people are divided. This tiny class of exploiters has a material

interest in spreading division and alienation. For them, it is a necessity. They accomplish this task not just through rhetoric – that is, by talking about divisive issues in the misnamed "culture war" – but by materially carrying out attacks that cost lives. For example, now, the billionaire-funded fascist politicians are cruelly blocking access to gender-affirming care for children, youth, and adults, when this is shown to reduce suicide; these politicians know very well that their policies are a form of violence against some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

By contrast, in Cuba, the working class is in power. There, the government uses all available science to develop its stance toward LGBTQ+ people, as with other social questions. We learned from doctors when visiting a Cuban polyclinic later in the day that Cenesex's work is integrated across all health institutions as part of the Ministry of Health. The Communist Party, the mass organizations of the Cuban people, the autonomous networks, etc., work together to transform society in a progressive way. This is demonstrated by the way that the new Families Code was developed through countless hours of outreach, with people meeting in every part of the island to discuss this important step not only for the Cuban people but for the social evolution of humanity.

A continuation of the Cuban Revolution

One activist emphasized that this process can't be exported. That is because this is a continuation of the Cuban Revolution, which has stood against imperialist aggression since 1959. In the United States, there is no close connection between the government and the people. We do not have progressive mass organizations that can develop, through ongoing conversation, a shared vision for moving forward as a society. On the contrary, we have a growing crisis of legitimacy in all existing institutions and not just the strictly political ones.

A legal advisor for Cenesex, Sonia Zaldivar, explained to us that this Families Code "was conceived and resulted from many years of fighting and the study of science. … By combining every type of knowledge – from the streets, from the academy, from other countries – [a Families Code was crafted] that stayed true to our conception of life. After 26-27 versions of

the document, which changed with discussions across society, the Code went into effect with over 60% approval."

While U.S. lawmakers are attempting to prevent discussion of LGBTQ+ life in schools, Cuba is ensuring that schools include lessons about sexual orientation and gender identity in the curriculum. The law affirms that parents have a responsibility to teach their children about these things and to respect their children's identities.

Cuba has redefined marriage and the family structure to include all types of actually existing families, from those with LGBTQ+ parents to households led by grandparents. The patriarchal nuclear family does not capture the reality on the ground, and in Cuba, it is no longer privileged in the legal framework. The new Code even gives more rights to step-parents (including step-fathers or step-grandparents) who have dedicated themselves to the care of a child.

Even though this process cannot be exported, we can learn from the tremendous experience of the Cuban people about how to make a revolution for a humane society. We have to make our own revolution. And we should understand that the blockade is not only an economic one targeting the Cuban people and causing them to suffer. It is also a blockade of knowledge, with people in the U.S. being denied information about Cuba's achievements – not to mention solidarity and material benefit, for example, if U.S. people could access Cuba's lung cancer vaccine.

In the U.S., there is a near-total media blackout on the new Families Code, as with other matters. The imperialists do not want us to know about this achievement. But, as the Biblical saying goes, "you cannot light a candle and hide it under a bushel." This Families Code is a light, and it is vital that people in the U.S. and other countries learn what is possible in this time when the bourgeoise and their fascist shock troops attempt to roll back every right we have gained. The Cuban experience teaches us the necessity of struggle. We must and will struggle.

SLL photo: Melinda Butterfield

The Conga Against Homophobia and Transphobia in Havana, Cuba On May 13, 2023

End the blockade! Build solidarity between people in the U.S. and Cuba!
‘Socialismo sí, homofobia/transfobia no!’ Cuba’s Conga celebrates advances in LGBTQ+ rights

Melinda Butterfield *May 26, 2023*

Conga, the traditional music and dance ensemble of Cuban carnival, with its pounding percussion, colorful costumes, and swirling dance, is beloved throughout the Caribbean and around the world.

A very special Conga took place in Havana on May 13 – the Conga Against Homophobia and Transphobia. Much like Pride Month celebrations in the U.S., Conga is both a proclamation and celebration of Cuba’s LGBTQ+ community.

This year was the first in-person Conga held since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. With 95% of Cuba’s population vaccinated with the country’s excellent locally developed vaccines, the event was able to go full-steam ahead.

The sweltering heat and threatening clouds of previous days had relented, and there was much to celebrate. Last autumn, Cubans overwhelmingly approved a national referendum on a new Families Code – one that vastly expands the legal rights of queer families and all families.

That victory was encapsulated in the theme of this year’s Conga, “Por todas las familias, el amor es ley”: For all families, love is the law.

Congas in Havana and Sancti Spíritus are highlights of the annual Cuban Days against Homophobia and Transphobia, marked this year from May 3-20. A visiting delegation of LGBTQ+ activists from the U.S., organized by Women in Struggle-Mujeres en Lucha, joined the Havana march.

As a crowd gathered near the Malecon in the late afternoon, friends old and new embraced, groups held aloft banners and flags, and activists posed for photos. A huge orange truck festooned with blue, white, and pink

Trans Pride flags rounded the corner, carrying loudspeakers and drag performers, waved in by Malú Cano Valladares, coordinator of the Transcuba Nacional network.

Conga musicians and dancers took their places and warmed up while dozens of hands took hold of the massive rainbow flag brought by Cenesex – Cuba's National Center for Sex Education.

At the front of the march, holding a long banner nearly the width of the street, an array of activists from Cenesex, Transcuba, HSH gay men's network, and the Network of Lesbian and Bisexual Women, were joined by international guests, including Puerto Rican trans matriarch Dianne Trinidad and Deirdre Deans, a Black lesbian member of the U.S. delegation.

They marched alongside Cuban First Lady Lis Cuesta Peraza, Cenesex director Mariela Castro Espín, Vice Minister of Public Health Carilda Peña, and Jorge Luís Broche, head of the Department of Attention to the Social Sector of the Communist Party of Cuba.

As the march stepped off, families, neighbors, and coworkers gathered on sidewalks and leaned out of windows to watch and cheer on the Conga. Some brought signs and banners of support. Parents hoisted children on their shoulders to watch. No hate groups were jeering or protesting from the sidelines – only solidarity and joy.

The day's most popular chant was "Socialismo sí, homofobia/transfobia, no!" – yes to socialism, no to homophobia and transphobia. Other chants celebrated the Families Code and denounced the U.S. blockade that causes grave harm to Cuba's queer community and all Cuban people.

As the march concluded, the thousands of participants joined a festival prepared in their honor. People ate, danced, talked, and flirted long into the night. Tomorrow, the work continues to educate and enact "the most advanced family code in the world," in the words of Cenesex's Castro Espín.

LGBTQ+ delegation meets with Federation of Cuban Women

By Lizz Toledo *May 31, 2023*

Havana – The LGBTQ+ delegation included multicultural, multi-generational, gay men, lesbians, bisexual, trans, and gender-nonconforming representatives from all over the U.S. We visited so many organizations, but among the most inspiring for this writer was the visit to the Federation of Cuban Women.

It was inspiring because it provided a beacon of hope as to what is possible for women and gender-nonconforming people in a socialist society. The FCW has been the seat of power for Cuban women and their families for over 60 years.

The structure begins from the base in each neighborhood, municipality, and province. Most members are volunteers, but there are some paid positions, particularly in the municipalities. The FCW is the organization that takes care of all concerns women in Cuba may have.

There is a national mandate for the advancement of women, and the FCW carries this program into action.

The FCW was founded by Vilma Espín, who is honored as the eternal president. But also in the national leadership are the First and Second General Secretaries. The Congress of the Federation of Cuban Women meets every five years and will be held next year in 2024.

Health is a priority

The health of Cuban women and their families is a priority for the FCW and the Cuban government. Health activities are handled by the Hygiene Brigade, which works with the local doctors and nurses living in the communities they serve.

"We must erect a monument to the women in the Hygiene Brigade during the COVID-19 pandemic," said the First Secretary of the FCW.

Regarding domestic violence, each ministry has created a program to address the victim and the aggressor. After the COVID-19 pandemic, a national leadership was organized to begin addressing and ending gender-based violence, another priority for FCW.

The national leadership develops penal codes and new laws related to gender-based violence.

Violence against women and other oppressed genders is harshly punished. Someone who kills their current or former female partner receives life in prison automatically. Depending on other extenuating circumstances, they may also receive mental health or substance use services while incarcerated. But some rights afforded to other prisoners may not be granted, i.e., overnight stays in the community.

The principal violence against Cuban women and other gender-oppressed people continues to be the U.S. blockade. This has been made worse by including Cuba on the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism.

The gall of the worst state sponsor of terrorism in the history of the world, the United States of Amerikkka, calling this small island a terrorist because they want to live in peace, without interference from any imperialist state. They want to care for their people, educate their children, provide health care from birth to old age, provide housing for all, and share with the rest of the world.

"We don't give our leftovers we give what we have," said the First Secretary of the FCW.

In Cuba, National Assembly of People's Power truly represents the people

Lizz Toledo *May 18, 2023*

Havana – The first thing you notice coming from the U.S. to the beautiful island of Cuba is how chill the people are. They hang out late into the night, chatting, playing dominoes, listening to music, or just watching the sights.

The second thing you notice is that government officials do not fear the people they represent. It is truly a government by the people and for the people.

Unlike U.S. government officials who do not mix among the people, Lis Cuesta Peraza, wife of Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel, and National Assembly Deputy Mariela Castro Espín marched among the people in the Conga Against Homophobia and Transphobia without any security detail.

When we visited the Capitol in Havana on May 12, there were no armed guards surrounding the building where the National Assembly of People's Power meets. At the entrance were two guards who waved our delegation of LGBTQ+ activists from the U.S. right in. We were escorted through the building by Sergio Martínez, a deputy of the assembly, who met with us and explained the Cuban political process.

The National Assembly has 470 elected deputies. They do not receive a salary for their service and are not allowed to get campaign funding. They are also subject to recall by the people of their districts at any time. Therefore they cannot be bought, and they cannot betray the districts they are there to represent.

Deputies must maintain their jobs in their chosen professions. What a contrast with U.S. Congress members and other elected officials who are owned and controlled by corporate lobbyists and dark money!

At the Capitol, the president, vice president, and secretary of the assembly, the presidents of the commissions, and their staff work throughout the year. But most elected deputies work in their communities and meet in Havana two times per year. If needed, the president can call a special meeting to discuss urgent matters.

At the end of May 2023, a special session will be held to discuss and approve the Social Communications legislation, to protect the Cuban people from the constant misinformation war waged by the United States.

The U.S. government hopes this misinformation war may work on Cuban youth because they know it hasn't worked on older Cubans, who remember what the country was like under Washington's thumb before the revolution – where children died of hunger and other curable diseases, people lived in shacks, and the majority of the population was illiterate.

But even the Cuban youth, especially those in the Union of Communist Youth and Federation of University Students, continue to defend their revolution and their homeland. "Although we are grateful for the solidarity the world has shown us, we can't wait for anyone to defend our revolution; we have to continue to build our revolution and a better Cuba today," asserted a young woman leader of the federation.

Elections in Cuba

When it comes to the electoral process in Cuba, you immediately notice that lies and misinformation are also propagandized to the people in the U.S. regarding "corrupt" elections in Cuba.

There is only one political party, the Communist Party of Cuba. But anyone can run for office. Candidates are selected by the community they live and work in. Each neighborhood gives from 2-8 nominations for delegates that are well-known and respected by their community, so capitalist-style campaigns are not allowed or necessary. They represent their neighborhoods in the Municipal Assembly.

From these, the candidates for the National Assembly are selected. Fifty percent of the candidates go through this process. The other 50% of the nominated candidates come from the mass organizations of civil society, where one will find the Federation of Cuban Women, Committees for Defense of the Revolution, Cuban Workers' Central, and others.

All the nominations then go to the National Candidacy Commission, where they are thoroughly vetted. There is no requirement that a candidate be a member of the Communist Party, although many are. This totally debunks the U.S. government's assertion that Cuba's Communist Party selects the legislature.

U.S. capitalist politicians can never understand integrity, honesty, or service to the people because they are put into power to serve the needs and wants of the ruling class.

The National Candidacy Commission proposes a final list of candidates, which go back to the Municipal Assemblies for approval, and finally to the general elections. Anywhere in this process, Cubans can reject a candidate but must provide evidence as to why they believe the candidate is unable to serve.

Currently, 55% of the National Assembly delegates are women. Some 73% of people voted in the last election. Compare that to the U.S., where just over half of the voting population participated in the 2020 general election.

After the National Assembly is seated, the deputies elect the president, vice president, and secretary of the parliament, and also the president and vice president of the Republic and members of the Council of State.

By law, a member of parliament carries the vote and the issues from their community, meeting with their constituency once a month. The work of a member of the National Assembly is one of service with no pay. They live in their communities and may be called upon to respond to a neighbor constituent in the middle of the night after a long day at their job. They are required by law and by duty to respond promptly. The people have the right to request the removal of any elected official.

The role of the Communist Party is to develop the guidelines for the development of a socialist society. The Party's mandate is to meet the needs of the majority of Cubans, to have social justice for all, and to ensure that every Cuban can express and participate in the development of the type of society Cubans want.

Contrary to the stated role of "representatives" in the U.S., the reality for people here is no social justice, homelessness, no medical care, hunger, and state-sanctioned violence.

Legislative process

For legislation to become law, it must be approved by the National Assembly. In the case of laws that affect the entire population, the people must vote for them.

The Council of State meets between the two annual sessions. Twenty-one deputies are elected by the National Assembly to serve on the council. Their charge is to serve the legislature by organizing and gathering information on issues brought by their constituents or mass organizations.

Legislation is prepared by a group of experts who develop a draft proposal. Then it goes to the respective sectors for input – for instance, farmers will have input in any legislation that affects farmers. Anyone who has an interest in the topic can request inclusion in the discussion and development.

After the National Assembly approves major new legislation, it may go to a referendum for the people to vote yes or no. Such was the case of the Families Code, passed in Cuba last year, a law that is far ahead of any country, especially the United States, as it relates to families and the LGBTQ+ community.

The interest of the Cuban people is paramount for the National Assembly. Imagine if we in the U.S. could truly have leaders that make our interests more important than the interests of Big Oil, Big Pharma, or Big Banks. Imagine our representatives working towards the development of a better life for all people in the U.S.

These scoundrels, our so-called "representatives," know nothing about sacrifice, service, or commitment. They will never willingly give up their millionaire donors, their mansions, and their paid expensive vacations.

Only a socialist revolution in the U.S. will wrench power from them and give it back to the people where it belongs.

SLL Photo

Cuban Deputy Sergio Martinez meets with the LGBTQ+ delegation from the U.S., May 12, 2023.

Impact of U.S. economic blockade

Deputy Sergio Martínez ended our meeting as most of the people we met ended their meetings – with a discussion on how the longest sanctions imposed on any country have impacted and continue to impact the people of Cuba. He spoke of its impact on energy production, agriculture, and medicine.

"The Biden administration has not been friendly and in fact has been more harmful with misinformation, the blockade, and now putting Cuba on the list of state sponsors of terrorism," Martínez explained.

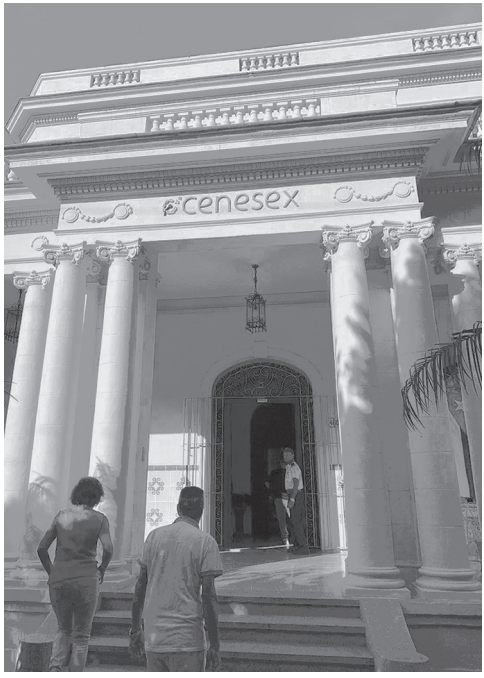
When we visited the Denunciation Memorial in Havana, I was disgusted by the gall of the U.S. imperialist government in having a list of so-called "state sponsors of terrorism." This same U.S. government has rained torture, rape, and murder on Cuba, all over the world, and upon its own citizens. Calling anyone else a terrorist is simply hypocrisy at the greatest level.

A recent meeting of Latin American countries voted against the exclusion of Cuba and demanded an end to the blockade, as well as taking Cuba off the terrorist list.

"We cannot wait for the U.S. to end the blockade. We have to develop our country with it still in place. Sovereignty is a right we will not renounce no matter what or at any cost," the humble, revolutionary servant of the Cuban people stated.

PHOTO: SERENA SOJIC-BORNE

Melinda Butterfield at tbe VII International Colloquium on Trans Identities, Gender, and Culture, held from May 4-6 in Havana, Cuba.



The beautiful Cuban building that is home to Cenesex.

SLL photo : Melinda Butterfield

A trans person reflects on Cuba and Florida: 90 miles and a world apart

Melinda Butterfield *June 15, 2023*

Returning from 12 days in Cuba in mid-May, I spent an uncomfortably long six-hour layover at the Miami airport, waiting for my connecting flight to New York.

It wasn't uncomfortable just because of the usual inconveniences like overpriced food and crappy seats but because I was a trans woman existing in the state of Florida, where the far-right anti-trans crusade has been centered this year.

As I sat in Miami, I was keenly aware that Gov. Ron DeSantis was preparing to sign several laws aimed at banning trans people from public life and getting the health care they need to live.

(DeSantis did sign these laws just a few days later, not by coincidence, on May 17 – the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia.)

One of those state laws bans trans people from using public restrooms that match their gender expression – including those in airports. When that law takes effect on July 1, trans women like me will be faced with the choice of risking arrest using the women's room or risking humiliation and violence using the other option.

During my six-hour sojourn, I used the airport restroom three times. Yes, I kept count; I was on guard for my safety and hyper-aware of everything around me. But as usual, no one objected to my presence or even noticed.

Waiting in Miami, I had plenty of time to reflect on the stark contrast between Cuba, where queer rights are advancing by leaps and bounds, and the United States, where they are being dragged backward by state-sanctioned violence.

That violence comes in the "official" form carried out by bigoted politicians like DeSantis and the off-the-books sort used by fascists coast-to-coast, who get a wink and a nod from the cops and big bucks and lavish media attention from the capitalists.

International Trans Colloquium

In May, I was part of the LGBTQ+ delegation to socialist Cuba organized by Women in Struggle-Mujeres en Lucha in cooperation with the Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP) and the National Center for Sex Education (Cenesex).

We went to learn about Cuba's revolutionary new Families Code, adopted by referendum last year. This document, described as the most advanced of its kind in the world, elevates the legal status of queer and other nontraditional families. It expands the rights of LGBTQ+ family members, children and youth, elders, people with disabilities, and more.

We also went to learn about the effects of the six-decade-long U.S. blockade on LGBTQ+ Cubans and all Cuban people. Our mission was to bring back information to help educate our communities, encourage them to oppose the blockade, and understand that another world is possible.

Officially, our delegation lasted for one week, from May 7-14. But two of us, both trans women, arrived in Havana a few days earlier to attend the VII International Colloquium on Trans Identities, Gender, and Culture, held from May 4-6.

This annual event, organized by Cenesex, brings together experts, medical professionals, and academics from several countries to discuss the latest research on gender-affirming care and the social challenges facing trans communities. This year there were participants from Mexico, Italy, Argentina, the U.S., and other countries, as well as Cuba.

Trans voices heard and respected

A lot of valuable information and views were shared throughout the colloquium. It was especially enlightening to hear how U.S. anti-trans propaganda is rippling throughout Latin America and Europe.

But for me, the most memorable moment came during the first afternoon's session, held in the beautiful building that is home to Cenesex.

A panel of doctors and researchers had just spoken about the medical challenges of gender-affirming care, from hormone therapy to surgery to mental health and treatment for trans youth. A group of trans women from Cuba, Uruguay, and Mexico had been sitting in the front row, listening intently to the presenters.

After the final panelist spoke, the women consulted among themselves, then demanded the floor. They objected to the tone and perspectives of some of the experts, who focused entirely on clinical research and standards of care divorced from the actual lived experiences and needs of trans people.

Mariela Castro Espín, Cenesex director and convener of the colloquium took the floor to support the trans activists, emphasizing how Cuba's approach to all kinds of health care, and trans health in particular, can never be divorced from the social conditions of the people it serves.

I couldn't help but imagine what would happen if a group of trans activists demanded the floor at a medical or academic conference in the U.S. to object to statements by official presenters. In all likelihood, they would be dragged out by security, perhaps even arrested.

This has happened in several U.S. state capitols recently when people dared to speak out against anti-trans legislation in those supposed "houses of the people."

But at this international event in Cuba, hosted by an official body of the Ministry of Health and in the presence of representatives of the country's media, trans people were not only free to take the floor and voice their concerns; their opinions were treated with respect and, in my view, helped change the tone of the rest of the conference.

Conga and the future

Following the conclusion of the International Trans Colloquium, on the evening of May 6, we were invited to attend the Gala Against Homophobia and Transphobia at the National Theater near Revolution Square. The fantastic, colorful annual event featured well-known Cuban musicians, live theater and dance, and incredible drag performances.

Unlike the recent invitation-only Pride event at the White House in Washington, D.C., the gala was open to everyone, and the 3,500-capacity hall was packed with happy, cheering queer couples and families. Tickets cost the equivalent of 35 U.S. cents.

The following day, we welcomed the rest of the delegation, including activists from Atlanta, Baltimore, Los Angeles, and New Orleans.

Over the next week, we attended several sessions at Cenesex to learn about different aspects of the Families Code and the development of queer

rights; we visited a polyclinic to learn more about Cuba's primary health care system and how the recommendations made by Cenesex for trans health care are integrated into the system from top to bottom; toured the Denunciation Memorial, a museum that exposes the history of U.S. terrorism against the Cuban Revolution; and received a briefing at the biotechnology center about Cuba's development of groundbreaking vaccines.

We also met with the Federation of Cuban Women and learned about its long history of elevating LGBTQ+ issues (going back to the early 1970s); spoke with district representatives about their responsibilities as elected community leaders; received a guided tour of the new Fidel Castro Center, documenting the life of the Cuban revolutionary leader; and finally, visited the national capitol to learn about Cuba's electoral and legislative process from a member of the National Assembly of People's Power.

One of the most exciting things I learned about was Cuba's constitutional "progress principle." This means that once granted, rights cannot be taken away. How unlike the U.S., where every one of our hard-fought rights is liable to be rolled back like the right to abortion was a year ago!

On our final full day in Havana, we joined the Conga Against Homophobia and Transphobia, marching through the streets shoulder to shoulder with our Cuban siblings, chanting, "¡Socialismo, sí! ¡Homophobia, transphobia no!"

The memory of the marchers' joy and political determination, of the happy neighbors and families cheering from apartment windows and sidewalks, of revolutionary political leaders in the front ranks, helped me get through the long hours in Florida, a state increasingly suffocated by censorious, repressive, and murderous laws meant to keep workers down and the rich on top.

In Cuba, I was never misgendered, never worried about using a restroom, and never felt unsafe for being openly and unabashedly myself. I want that for myself and all my trans siblings, everywhere, every day.

As I boarded my flight home, I felt more determined to build a National March to Protect Trans Youth and Speakout for Trans Lives in Florida this autumn – to give hope to our trans community there, to other communities under attack, to all of us. And more convinced of the need to show the LGBTQ+ movement that the Cuban path – the path of revolutionary socialism – is the way forward to trans and queer liberation.

A drag show In Havana

Gregory E. Williams *May 15, 2023*

Havana – Almost the moment we arrived at the corner next to this popular queer club, a car with one of our friends from the National Center for Sex Education (Cenesex) stopped by. She called us over to say hello before going on her way; she had just returned from airing a television roundtable with Mariela Castro Espín and others.

SLL photo

May 13 , 2023

The place was nearly empty because we arrived too early, at 11:00 p.m. But by 1:00 a.m. and the start of the drag show, it was absolutely packed.

I was moved to see community members as well as foreign guests enjoying themselves. We experienced a brief blackout earlier in the night, reminding us of the blockade.

(The electricity came back online quickly, though; this is the only one we have witnessed since being here.)

There was a wide age range represented, from very young to elders. In the crowd, we saw another friend from Cenesex – a trans woman whom we happen to know is 74 years old! Congratulations to her for being a model of strength and determination, as well as grace.

With all the people gathered at tables sharing drinks, there was little room for dancing, though some did. People sat talking and laughing with their arms wrapped around one another. Some kissed.

The drag performers regaled the people not only with style but affection. Throughout their performances, people got up on stage to give them money, hugs, and kisses.

The patrons were relatively mixed. There were masculine-presenting people as well as feminine ones throughout the bar.

Overall there was a strong impression of affection and community.

Cuban socialism advances biotechnology

Gregory E. Williams *May 15, 2023*

Twentieth anniversary of the Human Genome Project

April was the 20th anniversary of the official completion of the Human Genome Project (HGP). This was an international collaboration to identify all the DNA sequences comprising the human genome.

Planning for this colossal effort began as far back as 1984. The execution took 13 years, from 1990 to 2003. In actuality, the identification of nucleotide base pairs making up the genome was only 92% complete in 2003, when the project was declared completed. It was not until 2021 that the genome was sequenced, with only 0.3% of base pairs remaining undetermined.

The achievement by 2003 was astonishing. Countless hours of human labor combined with advances in computing power resulted in a nearly complete picture of the human genome only 50 years after the DNA structure was determined. The project was driven primarily by public collaboration – not market forces – with a relatively free exchange of information. Researchers worked in some 20 institutions in six countries, including China.

Since 2003, major milestones have been reached. For example, as of March this year, a Mississippi woman named Victoria Gray is experiencing a complete cessation of all symptoms of sickle cell anemia, a painful disease mainly affecting Black people. She began receiving experimental gene therapy using CRISPR technology in 2019. This would not have been possible without the HGP and other recent advances in genetics.

Advances hampered by the profit motive

The full potential of these and other scientific advances is hampered by the profit motive inherent in the capitalist mode of production. Consider that recombinant human insulin has been on the market since 1982, yet 1.3 million diabetic people in the U.S. rationed insulin in 2021; the Biden administration has moved to bring down prices, but, again, this is 41 years after the product became available.

In a period marked by anti-intellectualism, academic and even journalistic information remains behind paywalls. On the other hand, disinformation – as with the far right's anti-vaccine propaganda – is often free.

And on top of the more "normal" limitations placed upon scientific development are imperialist blockades and sanctions. The anti-imperialist movement should be clear that sanctions are war by other means. The blockade of Cuba is designed to put maximum pressure on the population to force regime change, benefitting foreign capitalists. It is designed to hurt common people, especially children and older people. The Cuban government estimates that as of spring 2022, they have lost more than $150 billion because of the blockade. That is $150 billion that could have gone toward health care, housing, or combatting climate change. It could have gone toward improving infrastructure to withstand the frequent hurricanes that batter the island.

Cuba develops biotechnology industry

Cuba is known around the world for its medical professionals. Cuban nurses and doctors go where there is need, to any country where they can travel. But Cuba is also distinguishing itself with world-class biotechnology research and manufacturing.

In Havana, our delegation visited the Centro de Ingeniería Genética y Biotecnología de Cuba – in English, the Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology in Cuba, established in 1986. Multiple staff were gracious enough to take a couple of hours out of their workday to explain the history of this industry in Cuba, detailing achievements made despite seemingly impossible conditions imposed by the blockade. This demonstrates how seriously they take internationalist solidarity. As with everywhere else we went, the staff emphasized the importance they give to interchange with people from the U.S.

This institution had humble beginnings when, in 1980, Fidel Castro met with U.S. oncologist Dr. Randolph Lee Clark and others to discuss the promise of interferons and other cutting-edge medicines. Fidel had a grand vision for this industry in Cuba. He understood how it could improve people's lives, developing alongside the free, comprehensive health care system.

Today, this sector can manufacture over 70% of the medicines used on the island. This strengthens the resilience and sovereignty of the national economy and assures access for the population. Since 2012, the biotechnology industry has been grouped principally under the state-owned BioCubaFarma, uniting multiple pre-existing entities. According to the presentation we saw, BioCubaFarma has 996 products on the national market, with 76% relating to public health.

By prioritizing this sector and integrating it with on-the-ground health care through socialist planning, Cuba has radically decreased the incidence of infectious diseases. The entire population up to 40 years old has been immunized against Hepatitis B, which kills up to 1 million people worldwide each year. As of 2021, Cuba has fewer than 100 cases of acute Hepatitis B. No cases have been reported for people 15 years old and younger.

This is just one example. Cuba is also on track to eliminate meningitis.

BioCubaFarma has produced a recombinant human epidermal growth factor – a drug called Heberprot-P – which improves healing of advanced diabetic foot ulcers. Around the world, patients with diabetic foot ulcers have a mortality rate of almost 50% within five years, making this condition a significant public health concern, including in the U.S.

To date, this industry has produced five vaccines against COVID-19, with Cuba's Abdala being the first COVID-19 vaccine developed in Latin America. Abdala has a 92.28% efficacy at three doses. Importantly, these vaccines do not require special refrigeration, making them suitable for wide distribution in the developing world.

In all, the presenter explained the development and impact of around 13 different biotechnology products. All of these are the result of heroic

U.S. LGBTQ+ delegation visits the Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology in Cuba.
SLL Photo

efforts in the face of the blockade. He was clear that the full development of the sector is impossible so long as the blockade is in place. As a worker in a U.S. molecular biology lab, this writer knows that all of the materials and equipment needed to carry out even the most basic research in these areas are expensive. It is difficult for laboratories in Cuba to replace non-functioning equipment or to obtain chemical reagents. He described these difficulties as "a continual nightmare."

For these reasons, biotechnology development is held back. This harms the Cuban people, who are deprived of income and more rapid scientific development. But it also harms people worldwide who could benefit from access to Cuba's products. That includes people in the U.S., especially the working class and oppressed.

For the free exchange of information

The Human Genome Project showed that great advances in knowledge and technical ability are possible with international collaboration and a free exchange of information. That project itself was nearly thwarted by forces representing a different vision – one which saw genetic therapies and even genes as exploitable for profit. This is emblematic of science under capitalism. Fortunately, the public project won out. But in general, the existence of capitalism and imperialism thwart the full flowering of human potential, including scientific advancement.

Cuba's scientific achievements under present circumstances are enormous. BioCubaFarma does have collaborative projects in some countries, including China and Spain. But without the blockade, much more would be possible. Imagine if researchers from Cuba and the United States could work together without this interference. Imagine how much poor and oppressed people in the U.S. would benefit from Cuban medicines and aid from their incredible medical professionals. Imagine the benefit to Cuba if its products were widely available in the U.S.

The working class in the U.S. has no interest in continuing the blockade. For us – as for the working class in Cuba – it is a detriment. What will benefit us, again, is the free exchange of knowledge and expertise. What will benefit us is internationalist collaboration.

A young transmasculine Cuban communist activist speaks with New Orleans LGBTQ+ activists

Verde Gil Jímenez June 22, 2023

New Orleans delegates gave a report back as part of the National Network on Cuba's Off the List Action Weekend. Verde Gil Jímenez joined via Zoom and gave the following presentation, explaining how the situation for trans people worsened when Trump intensified the blockade and put Cuba on the terrorism list in 2021. His remarks show how seriously the Cuban comrades take addressing their own shortcomings and setbacks, despite being leagues ahead of the U.S.

6pm at 2533 Columbus St. Jun. 22
Feat. Verde Gil Jimenez TransMasc Group of Cuba
Pizza provided!
Panel: Cuba's New Families Code
A report back by the LGBTQ Solidarity Delegation
Women in Struggle - Mujeres en Lucha, Freedom Road Socialist Organization, Real Name Campaign NOLA

RealNameCampaign on Instagram: 'LGBTQ Cuba delegation report back forum'

Hello colleagues. My name is Verde. I am a Cuban trans activist and a member of the Union of Young Communists. I'm 25 years old. I am a graduate of social communication. I currently work at the Central University of Las Villas as a social researcher. I live in a city in the center of the island called Santa Clara. I was regional vice coordinator of the Transcuba Network for a year and currently coordinate the Grupo Trans Masculino de Cuba (GTMC).

Transmasculine activism is a fairly recent development in my country. We are quite few and inexperienced. So we are slowly taking steps.

We created our Group at the beginning of the year [2023] with the intention of it being a place of support and learning for the transmasculine community because although there was a National Network of trans people for 20 years, its agenda focused almost exclusively on the demands and experiences of transfeminine people.

In less than a year with our group, we have achieved the following:

- Participated in: workshop on liberating masculinities with a feminist approach; in the conference against homophobia and transphobia (Cenesex); in the conference on maternity and paternity in equity (Cenesex); in a theological workshop on gender and diversity (Movimiento Estudiantil Cristiano); in a photographic exhibition on non-hegemonic masculinities, in a course on sexual education with second-year students of the medical school.
- We have created spaces for the art of male drag.
- We have held forums on various topics in our WhatsApp chat.
- We have held exchanges with different official and alternative media to visualize trans issues.
- On March 31, we held a film debate on trans childhoods.
- We have delivered donations of binders and clothing to trans from the three regions of the country.
- We have organized recreational activities for familiarization.
- We have designed educational products on how to accompany trans students and practice the cytological test on trans people AFAB [assigned female at birth].
- Permanently offer counseling and personalized advice to face difficult situations, effective support, legal guidance, and medical guidance on the transition process.
- We are currently organizing a community sale fair to raise funds to help the most needy people in the group.

For the short time that our group has been in existence, we believe that we are achieving good results and that, most importantly, we no longer feel alone.

Regarding the problems of trans people in Cuba, they are similar to those that most trans people face in Latin American countries.

It is true that the project of the Cuban Revolution, from its beginnings, sought to vindicate the role of women in society and supported the historically oppressed and marginalized sectors. However, it is still a very young project to banish all machismo, homophobia, transphobia, and sexism from our culture. They are very deep cultural roots from the colonial era.

It is worth celebrating that in recent times, after the constitutional reform of 2019, our country has generated a normative production that recognizes a series of rights for the benefit of trans populations (despite the fact that the term trans people is not expressly mentioned in any text).

It is of special importance the recognition from the constitution of the right to equality and non-discrimination based on gender identity and the right to the free development of personality.

The family code is also outstanding, which allowed equal marriage and recognized parental responsibility and the progressive autonomy of childhood. This progressive code grants an arsenal of protections in the family environment that favors affective, safe, and respectful environments for all people and family models.

In addition, there are pending reform laws that have also announced that they will recognize more guarantees for the trans community: Identity Law, Labor Code, Education Law, Health Law.

But we know that political will and written laws are one thing, and the materialization of those rights is another. Unfortunately, there is still a lot of transphobia in our country, based on a high level of ignorance about trans identities and naturalized machismo.

On the other hand, the economic crisis generates serious infrastructural obstacles for these rights to be effective. This crisis has been aggravated by phenomena such as the COVID-19 pandemic, in which our country devoted its greatest efforts and resources to saving people's lives by producing three excellent vaccines that are a lesson in humanism for the entire world.

Another of our permanent obstacles, and in recent years strengthened by the resurgence of neo-fascist governments, is the genocidal blockade of the U.S. government towards Cuba that causes losses of unquantifiable figures and hundreds of limitations for our free technological, commercial, scientific, and cultural development.

I take this opportunity to request the end of the blockade and denounce the cruel policy of the North American government towards our country. Their aggressions also fall on the lives of LGBTIQ+ populations. Trans people are also victims of North American politics.

One of the fundamental demands of trans people is access to comprehensive medical coverage for the transition process. I am referring to specialized consultations and access to hormonal therapies and gender reaffirmation surgeries.

In Cuba, for decades, there has been a commission of experts for these issues led by Cenesex. But the economic crisis has greatly affected our public health and has generated a serious lack of medical supplies and human resources. We are living in very difficult times because one of the most important achievements of the Revolution is being affected.

Currently trans people:

- We cannot attend to the specialized psychological consultation because there are no mental health specialists to attend to us.
- We cannot perform endocrinological medical check-ups to start or sustain hormone therapy because there is a lack of reagents for blood tests.
- There has been no sale of hormones in pharmacies for more than three years because, apparently, Cuba lost its trading partner to import hormones.
- Access to gender reaffirmation surgeries is practically impossible. In the case of transmasculine people, for nine years, mastectomies have not been performed because there are no doctors trained in this type of surgery.
- In addition, services are still centralized in the capital. That is, a person from any region must travel to Havana to receive these attentions.

One of the consequences of all this is that trans people buy hormones on the black market from unreliable suppliers and at costs that triple the average salary. And that people consume these drugs without medical supervision.

The saddest thing is knowing (firsthand) that before the Donald Trump government and the COVID-19 pandemic, several of these obstacles did not exist. At that time, there were sales of hormones in the pharmacy at insignificant prices, and we had psychological and endocrinological care, perfectible but systematic.

We are clear that it is very difficult for our government and our institutions to worry about issues of social minorities when they have to invest

in urgent issues that affect the vast majority, such as food sovereignty (food production). It is very difficult to advance in the midst of a multi-dimensional crisis and a constant imperialist siege. Because it would be unfair not to warn that although all the problems are traversed by our economic barriers, some of them could be solved more easily, and this is not the case due to a lack of awareness and will.

To name a few:

- Lack of training and awareness about trans people by legal operators (jurists, notaries, lawyers, judges, mediators). Here we highlight the persistent barriers to legal name change for trans people. Bureaucratism, corruption, and ineptitude of civil status registrars.
- The still non-permission to wear a school/work uniform according to the gender identity of the student/worker.
- The lack of a Comprehensive Sexuality Education in which the various sexual orientations and gender identities are discussed from an early age. As well as the lack of protocols to accompany the trans student.
- Provisional shelters for victims of gender-based violence in the family.
- Scarce and stereotyped representation in the national cultural industry (film, television, theater, cartoons, etc.)
- Lack of updated regulations that clarify how trans people entering compulsory military service or sports teams or prisons will be integrated and respected.

Due to all these problems, we believe that it is fundamental to be united and articulate initiatives that promote a humanist culture, peace, and equity, in favor of the social integration of sex-diverse populations.

As communist militants, my sources of inspiration are in the ideals of Marx, Fidel, Che, Rosa Luxemburg. Those who, beyond their contexts, always advocated for a world where people were increasingly emancipated from the mechanisms of oppression that the colonial-capitalist society has imposed on us.

I am clear about the dangers of carrying out a fight of this nature. There are not a few questions that from conservative and dogmatic positions (even amongst militants) are exercised to dismiss the validity of our activism.

I also understand that fears are not unjustified. It is true that social denunciations in Cuba are frequently used by the hate industry of the enemies of the Revolution (citizen movements manipulated by subversive organizations at the service of Washington's interests). It is also true that LGBTQ+ activism is being instrumentalized and fetishized for neoliberal, commercial, and political purposes.

And we, as a socialist project, cannot reproduce these formulas, but we must take advantage of the contradictions of capitalism that are revealed with our struggles to dismantle with more force that enslaving value scheme and those logics of privatization for an alternative society.

I defend the need to nurture communist militancy with a gender approach, as well as to address the problems of the trans community from a socio-class and Marxist analysis that allows us to understand where inequalities arise from and how the capitalist system perpetuates them. I believe that achieving this would make it possible to overcome prejudices and at the same time strengthen the common struggle that must put an end to the division of social classes, the social and sexist division of labor and, above all, the different hegemonies with their macro and micro powers to exercise violence against minorities.

As Rosa Luxemburg said: to build a world where we are socially equal, humanly different, and totally free.

The road is long, but we trust that we will not advance alone. We have the advantage that the Cuban Revolution has founded a very valuable fabric of social and mass organizations and public institutions, with which we can articulate to design new projects and find solutions. It is a matter of knocking on doors and mobilizing consciences. We have forged ourselves in a country where something that has not been lost is the spirit of resistance and solidarity.

I have tried not to go on too long, but it is always very difficult for me because there are many edges. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for the attention you have given me. I am going to post some messages in case you want to show solidarity with our Group. Any questions you have, you can ask me!

Chapter 4:
Pride Month Webinar –
Cuba's Queer Rights Revolution – Eyewitness Cuba

Thursday **JUNE 15** 8 pm Eastern / 7 pm Central
6 pm Mountain / 5 pm Pacific

- Just 90 miles from Ron DeSantis's Florida, socialist Cuba is making huge advances in LGBTQ+ rights with its new Families Code.
- How did Cuba achieve the 'most advanced policy in the world'? Why isn't the U.S. media reporting it? Why does Biden maintain Trump's punishing blockade measures and keep Cuba on the state sponsors of terrorism list?
- Hear from LGBTQ+ activists from across the U.S. who went to Cuba to see for themselves.
- Learn how queer rights are being prioritized from the grassroots to the National Assembly. Why U.S. queers should work to end the U.S. blockade of Cuba, and how you can join next year's delegation.

PANELISTS

Lizz Toledo Women in Struggle-Mujeres en Lucha • Atlanta
Serena Sojic-Borne Real Name Campaign & FRSO • New Orleans
Jordan David Lavender Guard • Los Angeles
Deirdre Deans Women in Struggle • Atlanta
Gregory Esteven Struggle for Socialism Party • New Orleans
Kiana Fok Peoples Power Assembly & Friends of Latin America • Baltimore
Melinda Butterfield Women in Struggle • New York

REGISTER:
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HOSTED BY ***WOMEN IN STRUGGLE ★ MUJERES EN LUCHA***
An affiliate of the **Women's International Democratic Federation**
For more Info: **WomenInStruggle.org**

Pride Month Webinar
▸Cuba's Queer Rights Revolution
▸Eyewitness Cuba

Melinda Butterfield: Welcome everyone to tonight's Pride Month webinar on Cuba's Queer Rights Revolution. Happy Pride Month. We're so glad you could join us here tonight and I'm so happy to be here with the other members of the delegation who traveled to Cuba last month to learn about Cuba's new Families Code that vastly expands the rights of queer families and all families and to learn about the U.S. blockade and its effect on the LGBTQ+ community and all Cubans. My name is Melinda Butterfield. I'm an organizer for Women in Struggle - Mujeres en Lucha and also co-editor of Struggle Lucha newspaper and tonight we're going to hear from all seven of the delegates who went on the trip from May 7 to May 14. We experienced a lot. Some of us, it was our first time in Cuba. Some have been there before but we all had amazing experiences there and learned so much. We're going to have presentations by the delegation and then open up in the chat for questions and comments so be thinking as you're listening to the talks about what you would like to ask us, questions you have, ideas you want to share, and upcoming events in solidarity with Cuba that you want us to know about. I am going to turn it over first to Lizz Toledo of Women in Struggle in Atlanta, Georgia.

Lizz Toledo: Hi comrades, friends, siblings. Welcome everyone. Thank you for joining us on this very, very, very exciting report back. You know, it's amazing. Even a month later I'm still like glowing with everything that I saw, everything that I heard, everything that I tasted. Just such an amazing trip. It is my first time to Cuba but it will not be my last.

Going there was a real rejuvenating experience for me since I've been an activist here in the States for many years and for those veteran activists it can be worrisome sometimes because it seems like we take a few steps forward and then we're pushed back. There's reaction from the ruling class and we're pushed back and it can be very demoralizing at times being here in the belly of the beast.

However, even today, every time something happens – another shooting somewhere, you know – my first thought, this would never happen in Cuba. This will never happen in Cuba. When people are getting put out of their homes and housing prices are through the roof. Everything is just so high that people can't even afford to live or eat. My first thought is always this would never happen in Cuba. Under a socialist system, under a true socialist revolution, it will never happen. And so being back here after that experience just really motivates me even more to continue to fight for a socialist revolution here in the U.S.

I was so impressed by so many things that I just really can't even begin to pick which one impressed me the most. But the highlight of my experience was meeting Mariela Castro. It seemed like all the Cuban people are so well-trained, disciplined, and educated in revolution that it just felt like I was among geniuses. I really just enjoyed everyone who I met and expressed how they fight for the revolution, what the blockade does to them, but they still continue to fight from, from like Ms. Castro all the way down to a worker in the community just talking about no matter what they have to go through, they will continue to build revolution, they will continue to fight against this big imperialist power that the U.S. is in not only Cuba but throughout the world. So I was really impressed by the knowledge, the wisdom, from Mrs. Castro all the way down to whoever – anybody that I spoke to was talking about revolution and sharing about revolution and what socialism means to them in Cuba and what it has done for them in Cuba.

So that was one of the things that really impressed me, that everyone just really is well-versed and happy. That also impressed me because it can be so depressing being here sometimes. In Cuba people were in the streets in the middle of the night just playing dominoes, like nothing, you know, something that could never happen in my neighborhood because of all the oppression and everything else that goes on with living in the U.S.. And then, of course, in Cuba, all the policies that were written and fought for and are being implemented, there is no taking back of rights that are given.

They never have to fear that today trans youth have rights but tomorrow they may not or today women have rights – and there's the right to choose

and the right to an abortion – but tomorrow that can be taken away, that everyone has the right to housing, but tomorrow that can be taken away. That doesn't happen in Cuba, but that happens here in the U.S. every second of the day. Every time we take a few steps forward, it's always a pushback later on. And always having to fear that. We have to be on guard and always have to be fighting to push, to beg, to fight for whatever measly crumbs they want to throw our way.

Well, there in Cuba, in this small little Caribbean island, they're able to sustain themselves even with all the attacks from the U.S., even with all of that, and the spirit continues to be strong and the spirit continues to inspire. Like I said, that's the number one thing that really impressed me about the whole trip, just the Cuban spirit, the fightback spirit, the energy, the laughter, the joy in everything that they do. And everything is for the people and by the people. I'm sure the other delegates will go more into detail, but in general, I recommend that every revolutionary visit Cuba and support Cuba in any way possible, including calling for an end to the blockade, and sending aid in whatever ways that you can.

And of course, demanding that Cuba gets taken off the sponsors of terrorism list that is being written down by the biggest sponsor of terrorism in the world, that is the United States of America. So that's all I got. I hope that, you know, any questions that you would like to ask at the end, I'm more than welcome to try to answer them or any comments, whatever. Thank you so much for taking the time to come to this very important webinar and happy Pride to everyone.

Melinda Butterfield: Thank you, Lizz. Our next speaker is also from Atlanta, Dee Deans.

Deirdre Deans: Thank you so much, Mrs. Toledo for all your information. I'd like to say that this is my very first time here. I'm kind of new. I'm also very nervous. Need to get that out of the way. This is my first time being here with the comrades and my first time ever attending any event like this. So thank you comrades for inviting me and taking a chance on allowing me to share my experience in Cuba.

That was also my very first time going to Cuba. That has been something on my bucket list forever. I finally had the opportunity to go. Thanks to all the comrades and my partner, Lizz. When I first got there, guys – and I'm going to be all over the place again because I'm very nervous. This is my very first time. When I first got there to the place, when I first got off the plane, it was just the – I want to say, the sun, the environment was so peaceful, so calm. As I walked through the airport and out of the airport, I saw all these antique classic vehicles. I thought, my God, there must be a classic show here. It must be a car show here because I saw all these antique cars. I saw so many antique cars that I really thought that it was a show.

So being there was a great experience for me because it was nothing like I thought it would be. All the things that I heard, all the negative things that I heard about Cuba, I saw none of that. I experienced none of that. It was just an awesome feeling to be there because the people were so cool, so laid back, so relaxed. People weren't worrying about whether they were going to get shot or if somebody was going to come up and rob them. Everybody was just so cool. You could actually just sit down and feel comfortable there. Nobody was judging anybody. Nobody was worried about whether you were going to be attacked because you were lesbian or gay. The people were just so welcoming.

That family code that they have there – I mean, it could be two men, two women. It could be an aunt, a cousin. It could be a godmother, a sister. As long as you're there with the person for a certain amount of time, they consider that a family. It doesn't have to be a man and a woman or the traditional family that we have here. They consider whoever is there for a certain amount of time, they're considered family. I was really impressed by that part because here, you have to be either a husband and a wife to be considered a family.

Also, there was no police. I very rarely saw the police. When I did see the police, they had billy clubs and a walkie-talkie. When I was at the parade, there was no police, no barricades, no dogs. Everybody was there freely and friendly and performing and just calm and relaxed. I didn't

even realize that I was actually standing by the president's wife and the niece of Fidel Castro. I didn't even realize that I was standing by these people and there was no police. There was actually people with security on their shirt, but there was no fear. We didn't have to worry about whether or not there was going to be a bombing or a shooting or a fight breaking out. It was very relaxed there. I couldn't believe that.

I've always heard about how you can go to these different countries and you can go to school for free. You can get free medical care. When I heard that, I was like, oh my God, it really does exist. You can actually get medical care for free, where here, you don't even want to go to the hospital because of the bill that you have to pay. There, it's free. They actually have people in each community who take care of the people's issues in that community. And these people don't get paid for this. I mean, they actually have people assigned in a community. They have clinics assigned in that community for people that may need to have medical assistance that can come, that don't need insurance, that don't have to be concerned about a bill.

The education is free, so 95% of the people are literate. If you're under 25, you could actually come there and become a doctor free. So they have things there that are just unheard of here. Things that are going on here are not taking place there. And it's just amazing. I couldn't believe that those things are actually happening, that you can actually walk around and not be afraid that somebody is going to beat you up because you're a lesbian or gay. You don't have to worry about those things. So I was pretty impressed with that. And I am looking forward to going to Cuba every year. In fact, I thought I wanted to move to Costa Rica, but now I'm looking forward to maybe possibly moving to Cuba.

So I guess that's all I have to say for now. I took a lot of pictures over there, did a lot of videos over there, and I'm really looking forward to going back to be able to do the same thing next year, if you comrades would have me.

Melinda Butterfield: Thank you, Dee. And yes, Dee was our official, unofficial videographer and photographer throughout the trip. And we're looking forward to having her do the same next year. Next, I'm going to

call on Serena Sojic-Borne, who is a representative of the Real Name Campaign in New Orleans, and a member of Freedom Road Socialist Organization.

Serena Sojic-Borne: Hey, thanks, Melinda. So y'all came onto this panel thinking you were going to hear about Cuba, but I actually have a little thing to say about a place called Louisiana.

Here in the past three years, there has been attack after attack on the LGBTQ community by the Republican Party and the far-right elements in it, especially. This year they considered the Don't Say Gay Bill, like a copy of Florida's bill that would ban the mention of sexuality and gender identity in schools. They considered what we're calling the Dead Name Bill. It's a bill that would require teachers to use incorrect names and pronouns for students, names and pronouns reflective of their birth certificate. And even if the student comes in with a parental note saying my parent is okay with me being called a different thing, even in those cases, the teacher can still refuse the parental note at their own discretion, right?

This is what the bill would say. We also have book bans that are being considered, being pushed by the horrible reactionary attorney general, Jeff Landry, and a ban on transgender kids getting medical care. And then last year, the Democratic governor let pass a ban on transgender girls playing sports. So that's just a little overview of the conditions that we're fighting against here. And you can see the right wing here in the U.S. is going after LGBTQ kids, especially. And there's a good reason for this for the ruling class here in the U.S. This is a capitalist country. It's run by billionaires, by corporations, and these members of the ruling class are constantly looking to expand capitalism, right?

And to expand capitalism, you need two things. You need a growing workforce and you need a reserve labor force to draw from whenever you're trying to expand. And women and LGBTQ people, because they're always so chronically underemployed, they're the reserve to draw from, and their gender roles help increase the workforce. If you enforce strict gender roles, basically telling people you gotta have straight couples, marry young, start having kids as young as you can, and crank out as

many kids as you can. That's the way to go for the Republican Party and the U.S. capitalist class. In Cuba, when we went there, we met with activists from Cenesex, which is the Center for National Sex Education. I actually have one of their affiliated organization's magazines here, Trans Cuba, from the Trans Cuba Network of Activists.

And in Cenesex, they organize to fight for LGBTQ rights in the country, and they're supported by the Communist Party, they're supported by the government. So they are in the same position in Cuba as bigots are in the United States, right? The bigots here have the government support, the progressives in Cuba have the support of the party, of the government, and of the people. When we were talking to these Cenesex activists, we learned about the new Cuban Families Code. And the Families Code is what we were there to celebrate. That was the initiating factor for our trip. That was passed last year, and we went. And if you read about the Families Code in the U.S. media, they will tell you that it's about legalizing gay marriage.

But the Families Code, like we saw there very clearly, is about much more than just legalizing gay marriage. Like Dee was talking about, you can prove in court family relationships based on care, not blood. So anyone can be families with anyone based on care. You have family defense offices. Neighborhood by neighborhood that have teams of social workers and lawyers that a child can go to and then make a claim about domestic abuse or rejection or custody dispute in their families. And those bodies will evaluate the child's maturity, evaluate the claim based on the child's maturity, and then bring it, if appropriate, to court. So a child does not have to have a lawyer and does not have to go to the district attorney or anything like that, doesn't have to rely on the help of whether or not a nonprofit may or may not be there and can just go straight to an organization that'll take their claims to court.

And Cenesex, on top of that, they promote sex education all the time. Posters about HIV in classrooms, in polyclinics – that don't demonize LGBT people, that make sure people use condoms. In every way, it's the polar opposite of what we have here in Louisiana. Here, the right wing is attacking LGBTQ kids. In Cuba, they're setting the foundations for

progress for LGBTQ people and for kids to have agency. And the reason for that is because Cuba has eliminated capitalism. That's the basis of it. They have a socialist society and they have also laid the foundations for women's liberation.

And by doing these things, the LGBTQ movement was able to come out of this fight against capitalism and win their gains and have their gains be permanent like Lizz was saying. And the last thing I will say is imperialism certainly isn't through with Cuba. The U.S. empire certainly considers Cuba to be their unfinished business. Ever since the 1959 revolution, they've been keeping Cuba under conditions of blockade that blocks even basic medications, menstrual products, toilet paper, condoms, anything like that from entering into the country, pretty much anything from entering into the country. And on top of that, the U.S. funds evangelical protestant groups inside Cuba in the same way that billionaires fund evangelical protestant groups inside the U.S. to spread anti-LGBTQ bigotry.

And at the same time, they play the liberal card too. They try to recruit the LGBTQ activists from Cenesex and draw them away from Cuba. But the Cuban people are standing strong and they're continuing to progress despite all of this. And our duty as revolutionaries here inside the U.S. is to be fighting here to defend Cuba and to oppose U.S. imperialism, to end the blockade and to stop all the attacks against the island.

Melinda Butterfield: Thank you so much, Serena. Next, we're gonna hear from Jordan David from Los Angeles, who is a member of Lavender Guard.

Jordan David: Hi, I'm Jordan. In 1967, LAPD attacked the Black Cat Tavern in Los Angeles as LGBTQ people were exchanging their New Year's kisses.

And the community fought back to the point where the chaos shut down the entire block for the whole day. It was the first Pride even before Stonewall. The same fight continues today as legislators are passing hundreds of bills around the country to strip away our rights. And at the same time, Cuba has enshrined queer rights into their constitution and

they've included a clause that they can never be rolled back. I couldn't possibly share everything that I learned during this delegation. So today I'm just gonna discuss a few connected issues: police, prisons, and Pride. So first let's talk about police.

Now, technically they haven't abolished the police in Cuba, but you would think they had when you go. I think I saw maybe one police officer the entire time I was there. And I went a lot of places, right? Like truly, they're really not around much, especially in comparison to here. And I've never felt safer in my whole life. Now we did get a chance to learn how things work from experts. And so what we know is that the police that do exist in Cuba, they don't carry guns when they're on patrol. They don't even carry pepper spray.

What they do carry is the responsibility to find a good solution to problems. Now, the Cubans want me to say, of course, everything's not perfect, right? There are still problems with police. There are individuals who want to take advantage of roles of power, but the bad apple trope actually applies in Cuba, whereas it doesn't apply in the U.S.. But the difference is when Cuban police make mistakes or have bad behavior, they're actually held accountable. They're punished for it to the point where nobody wants to be a cop in Cuba because you can't just do whatever you want and get away with it.

And so that's police. Now I want to talk a little bit about prisons. So prisons in Cuba are not based in slavery like they are in the U.S. In Cuba with the penal system, when they're thinking about a punishment for a crime, they're thinking about how it's going to impact the entire community and not just this individual person. For example, prisoners are allowed to go home to their families on the weekends, unless there's an extreme security risk. Their prisons have maternity rooms in them. They provide comprehensive health care. They provide family care. They provide job training.

The National Federation of Cuban Women provides care for domestic violence victims, both the victims and the perpetrator. So they really are putting this restorative justice model into practice. And so the ultimate

form of violence that is happening in Cuba right now is the blockade and the effects of being on the state sponsors of terror lists.

I've talked a little bit about police and prisons. I want to talk now about Pride. We got a chance to attend the Conga Against Transphobia and Homophobia. This is basically a protest march with the purpose of normalizing the existence of LGBTQ people and as a celebration of our existence at the end.

And it's important to say that that's the purpose. We got to see what Pride in its true purpose actually looks like. In its true purpose there were no corporations, there were no advertisements, there were no ticket prices, and there were certainly no police, not even revolutionary police.

Now in contrast to that, when I came home – I live in the city of West Hollywood, which kicks off Pride season for, I believe, the whole country – and it's basically become this giant money grab for big companies. They line up rows of corporate advertisements along the streets, the city government sends in legions of militarized police, and we know these police to be a network of violent gangs. You can actually google LASD gangs, they're well known. We know that these police are also affiliated with the KKK, they're neo-Nazis, they're Proud Boys, they're not on our side.

On the very second day of West Hollywood Pride, when I got back, two of my comrades who are organizers were brutalized and arrested. The police were walking by their booth and started making fun of them and their queer paraphernalia, and they said, you know, this is why we don't want cops at Pride. Five minutes later, the police snuck up behind them and attacked them, took them away to our slavery prison system, made up phony charges, the community raised $10,000 to bail them out, the police took the money, kept it, made up new charges, and kept them in jail anyway.

And, you know, it's just interesting that the United States would accuse Cuba of being authoritarian, of state repression, and what we see is that it's all a projection, right? All the state repression and violence, and especially against queer people and other marginalized groups, is happening here.

So just to recap, we talked about Cuban police not having much of a presence; they're unarmed. Prisons involve care, and they don't disappear people from their communities, and Pride was a protest without profit or police. So, in conclusion, abolitionists in the U.S. are correct. And, you know, the abolitionists here aren't saying that we should flip a switch and have no more public safety resources, right?

What abolitionists are saying is that if we pour our resources into the well-being of communities, we can actually prevent most crime from happening in the first place. And any forms of violence that persists, we can develop humane community-led approaches to deal with them. And Cuba is doing exactly this, exactly what we're calling for. Housing, health care, education, jobs, and even a food ration are provided, and as a result, crime is extremely, extremely low. It is one of the safest places on earth. And even after the revolution, there's no cops at Pride.

Melinda Butterfield: Thank you, Jordan. And I should say, Jordan really did get to see a lot more than the rest of us did, because Jordan was out every night, meeting people, investigating, and really got to see whole other sides of the city. So, really exciting to hear that report. Our next speaker is Gregory E. Williams from the Struggle for Socialism Party in New Orleans.

Gregory E. Williams: Hello, everyone. On the last evening that we were in Havana, as Jordan said, we attended the Conga Against Homophobia and Transphobia. And I had an encounter with an activist who we had met earlier in the trip, I think on the first day that we were there, actually, that really encapsulated the experience for me in a certain way.

We were just finishing the march, and everyone was sort of filtering into a space, basically having a block party in a celebratory mood. And this activist, who is an older woman with the Network of Lesbian and Bisexual Women in Cuba, she came up to me, and she said, "hi, I just wanted to say hello, because I was there the first day that you all were at Cenesex having a discussion." So, first of all, I was impressed that she recognized me. I recognized her as well. I think that speaks to how seriously the Cubans take solidarity.

I'm going to read this. It's the best paraphrase I could do. I wrote it down afterwards. She said, "I'm so glad that you all from the United States are here to see what is really happening. Please come back. Have coffee with us in our houses." I remember that phrase so clearly, "in our houses, because there's so much that we need to talk about." She said, "the imperialists are trying to stop this process, and they will do anything to put an end to the revolutionary process."

So, I was kind of blown away by this. And after the trip, I kept thinking, what is this process? And I think she really meant the continuation of the Cuban Revolution itself.

The Federation of Cuban Women was founded in 1948, and when the revolutionaries came to power in 1959, this was a tremendous, tremendously important organization that played a huge role in the early literacy campaigns, and so much of the work that was done on the ground in the revolution. Through that work, the first Families Code was adopted in 1975, establishing more rights for women in society. Cenesex grew out of the work that the Cuban Federation of Women were doing.

They were addressing issues around gender and sexuality, and Cenesex became its own organization because that was something that was needed in the context of the changing society. Societal views were changing. It's because of all this groundwork that the new constitution was adopted in Cuba in 2019, through a huge process that happened with people were debating – in all the little towns, all the neighborhoods throughout Cuba – to create a constitution that reflected the current reality. If only we could do that in the United States, instead of just having everything dictated based on what slave owners said over 200 years ago. That constitution also expanded the rights of LGBTQ people and others, and brought about more changes to eliminate discrimination in society.

So you could say that the Families Code that was adopted last year came out of that process as well. And when we were at Cenesex, one of the legal advisors for the organization, Sonia Zaldivar, gave an incredible talk, and she explained to us (this was a direct quote I wrote on the spot), she said that the code "was conceived and resulted from many years of

fighting and the study of science. … By combining every type of knowledge – from the streets, from the academy, from other countries."

They were even studying U.S. laws. That's how they created the Families Code. And she said that it stayed true to their conception of life, and was ratified by a large majority of the population. So I just wanted to make a few comments about this.

I kept thinking about the process, the process that the imperialists are so desperate to stop. How is the process possible? And my answer, based on what we observed, is that it's socialist planning. And I think it's important to note that when we talk about socialist planning, it does not just mean in the narrow economic sense that's defined by bourgeois economists. You know, for the capitalist, everything that's not profit is an "externality." So maternal mortality, that doesn't matter to the capitalists. Why do you even have an economy if it's not to improve the lives of the people?

In a socialist system, the case is different. The needs of the people are the reason for running an economy. And when we went to the National Assembly of People's Power at the Capitol, one of the deputies, Sergio Martínez, spoke to us for a long time, and he explained that in Cuba and the socialist economy, the state-owned enterprises and the cooperatives play the leading role. And that's even with some market reforms that have been made. In recent years they have increased some small and medium-sized businesses – like, you know, people who want to operate a hair salon in their house, or a babysitting outfit, you know, there's different things. But the backbone is the collective economy that is geared towards developing the society to meet the needs of the people. And that is absolutely true and reaffirmed in the 2019 Constitution, and also in the New Families Code.

It stands to reason that if oppression is something that's systemic, if it's structural, then liberation has to be systemic, too. It requires the building of a new system. And that's what we saw in Cuba.

Now, I'm going to present my next to last slide, which is sort of overwhelming. It started turning into sort of a joke as I was making it, because I started thinking about what are all of these organizations and institu-

tions that we encountered? So I started listing them. And I intentionally didn't look any up, like I wasn't looking for, okay, what are the different organizations that have contributed to the formation of this code, scouring the internet. These are just ones that we encountered relatively directly. And so this is not a real organizational flowchart. This is just something to give a flavor for the interrelationship of things. [The slide shows around 15 organizations and institutions with arrows connecting them.]

How is it that something like the Families Code could occur? As I said before, Cenesex itself came out of the Cuban Federation of Women, and that groundwork that had already been laid, and it's under the Ministry of Health. So it is sponsored by the state. At the same time, the work that Cenesex does rests on that foundation of the free, comprehensive health care system that Cuba has. From the neighborhood level to specialists, it's all free, geared towards meeting the needs of the population. And we learned that when we visited a polyclinic in Havana, and were able to talk to doctors, they explained that the guidelines that Cenesex is creating through this collaborative process in the society, that's being reflected in the health care system, in how they administer care. It's changing as the society changes.

And also, the fact that people are able to get gender-affirming care, trans people are able to get it for free. Cuba may have shortages in the medical system because of the blockade, but nobody's being intentionally denied access to hormones and the things that they need – or insulin for that matter.

And speaking of the state-owned economy, we also toured the headquarters of BioCuba Pharma, which is the umbrella organization for the whole Cuban biotech sector. And they are currently able to produce over 70% of the pharmaceuticals that are used in the country. That's something that supports and enables this free, comprehensive health care system that's available to everyone, including queer and trans people who are not discriminated against on that basis.

Just a couple more things. We also learned about how laws are passed. For example, in the U.S. we've experienced this tremendous blow against

the whole working class – especially women and people who are able to be pregnant – with the re-criminalization of abortion in much of the country. In Cuba, it would be impossible to pass any law about abortion without consulting the Federation of Cuban Women, which includes the vast majority of women in the population. And they also work with trans women who are involved in all the activities of that organization. They have to consult about any law that affects women. They can't have some law that's being created by a right-wing think tank and funded with all the lobbying money.

If there were a new law that was going to affect the agricultural sector, they would have to get the approval of the vast majority of farmers who are organized through various types of trade unions. In general, that's how the legislative process works in Cuba, and that played out in how the family's code was developed. And because the code is so broad and encompasses every aspect of life and society, they really had to go to the grassroots, to every neighborhood and province of the island. They had to have these discussions resulting in over 60 drafts of the law before it was passed.

Masses of ordinary people were involved, and transformed in the process. We don't have a coherent way of doing that in the U.S. because we don't have these revolutionary institutions. We don't have this system that allows that to exist. So that's the point of this slide, again, just to give some little taste. It's an ecosystem that all works together.

Overall, it was a very amazing experience to be able to talk to people who are doing this work on the ground in Cuba, and to at least get a glimpse of how the system operates. It was almost like we were getting a taste of it ourselves by being in these meetings and seeing how normal it is in Cuban society that everybody gets together and talks things out to solve problems. That was a hopeful thing for me to witness. I encourage anyone else to go to Cuba. We have to work to end the blockade, increase our support and solidarity with the Cuban people. Thank you so much.

Melinda Butterfield: Thank you, Gregory. Our next speaker is Kiana Fok from Baltimore. She works with the Friends of Latin America, and Baltimore People's Power Assembly and other organizations.

Kiana Fok: Hello. I'll be talking about going to Cuba for the first time, as well as, I guess my ultimate takeaway from listening to the talks at Cenesex, especially how the family code got passed. So, when we first arrived in Cuba, we learned about how medical care is pretty much free – no jumping through hoops with your insurance and worrying about going bankrupt.

The fact that there are local people's institutions – people from the community that you can go to if you have any concerns within your own neighborhood. So, the fact that people are connected with the community is just amazing. Here, you're lucky if you got that in your own suburb or neighborhood. It makes me realize and wish that the U.S. would have something like that for people to be more involved with each other.

And during the talks that I was listening to I took away that the whole process of the Families Code is – well, I guess the spirit of Cuba in general – is that they never stopped fighting. Even though they won the revolution, gaining their liberation and freedom from the U.S., they continued fighting to build their government so they could serve the people; along with balancing all the attacks from the U.S., right up to this day.

Consider the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. I mean, there were so many things that happened: infiltration and killing of revolutionary leaders, and the powerful taking away the narrative. But it was like, once Black people got the right to vote, the people on top said, "you've won the fight, there's no more need," and some in the movement ended up walking away. And as I said, there were many other factors that led to the fight for furthering freedom and liberation declining around the late '70s.

So, what I'm getting at is that Cuba – even though they pass the Families Code – the fight is not over. All the members of Cenesex reached out to their community, talked with other people to bring more educational awareness about LGBTQ people and why they should be supported. So, it's a long process of changing the culture and mindset. That was the biggest takeaway I got from listening to all the talks about the Families Code.

And that's something that we in the U.S. would have to do. We're basically rebuilding the fights. Right now, unless you're connected to certain groups and organizations, then you're not hearing about it. But it is growing, and one thing I hope we keep in mind – even with all the infiltration – is just to keep going. We may have won one milestone for our rights but the main thing is we keep fighting, and keep having conversations with people like what the people of Cuba are doing with the LGBTQ struggle.

That's pretty much my talk and report back from Cuba.

Melinda Butterfield: Thank you so much, Kiana. So, I'm going to say a few things before we move on to Q&A and announcements. It's really hard to figure out what to say because we experienced so much in such a short period of time. One of the things that was said at Cenesex during our visit that really stuck with me – and it's a message I want to bring back to the queer community here – is that Cuban parents have a responsibility.

They are expected to discuss gender and sexual issues with their children. In a way that is open and accepting. And they have a responsibility to accept their children, however they choose to express themselves, whether they're trans, non-binary, in other ways gender queer, whether they're gay, lesbian, bisexual. And that, just in and of itself, that relationship of parent and child, of responsibility rather than ownership that we see being bandied about so much in the U.S. right now, is such a fundamental difference, something for us to aim for.

Serena and I went a few days earlier, before the rest of the delegation, to attend an annual colloquium on trans identities, gender and culture that was held in Havana from May 4 through 6. This is an event that brings together experts and medical professionals and academics from all over the world. Particularly this year there were big delegations from Italy, Mexico, Argentina. There was someone from the U.S., apart from us, as well as from Cuba.

And there was a lot of great information shared during that three day event. But the thing that really stood out to me – coming from the U.S., with all the attacks on queer rights, and particularly trans people – was on

the first afternoon of the conference. There had been this big panel of doctors and researchers, talking about medical challenges of gender-affirming care, all different aspects of it from hormone therapy and surgery to mental health and treatment of trans youth.

And there were three trans women. I later found out they were from Cuba, Uruguay, and Mexico. They were sitting in the front row, listening very intently to these medical professionals. And at the end of the panel, they consulted among themselves, these three women, and then demanded the floor. And they had objections to the tone and perspectives of some of the experts who had talked, who focused entirely on clinical research and standards of care, and that they felt were divorced from the actual lived experiences and needs of trans people.

After they spoke, Mariela Castro, the director of Cenesex and convener of the colloquium, took the floor to support them. And she emphasized how Cuba's approach to all kinds of health care can never be divorced from the social conditions of people that it serves. And this made a huge impression on me because I couldn't help but think of what would have happened in the United States if three trans activists had taken the floor at an academic, professional conference, and objected to what the official presenters were saying.

They would have been removed, kicked out, possibly even arrested. But in this case, in Cuba, these activists were listened to respectfully, supported, and in my view, their intervention helped to change the tone of the remainder of the event to one that was much more inclusive of the trans perspectives. And I should say, this was not like a conference where there were doctors or professionals who were hostile to trans people or not supportive of gender-affirming care. Everyone there was supportive and definitely believed in providing the support. But even then, even in that circumstance, it can be necessary, as we know, for an oppressed group to speak in its own name and be able to have an influence on that. And in Cuba, that happens. That really stuck with me throughout the time that we were there. I thought about that and other things that we saw on my way back from Cuba.

Of course, on our last full day in Havana, we went to the Conga, which is the big Pride march, and that was fantastic and inspiring. I loved that one of the main chants that they had was, "Socialismo sí, homofobia / transfobia, no!" – yes to socialism, no to homophobia and transphobia. So very affirming, not only of queer existence and queer lives, but also the struggle for socialism.

But the following day, as we returned back to the U.S., I had a very long layover, about six hours in Miami at the airport. And it was very surreal for me as a trans woman coming from Cuba, where I had been treated with so much respect and seen the advances that our community is making, even under the terrible conditions of the U.S. blockade, and all of the shortages and difficulties that that creates.

But to come then to Florida and sit in this airport and think about the terrible laws that have been passed, that DeSantis was preparing to sign into law. And he did just a few days later on the international day against homophobia, biphobia and transphobia. What a slap in the face to everyone. You know, one of the things that he signed was a bathroom ban for trans people. And so it was very kind of in your face, right? I'm sitting in the airport on a long layover and thinking about how starting July 1, someone like me who uses a bathroom in an airport would be arrested, or could be arrested for using the women's room. Or risk violence using the other restroom.

And this governor, the system – even the Democrats in power in Washington who claim to be such supporters of LGBTQ people – have demonized Cuba. At the time when it is advancing and fighting for the rights of our community, our siblings, the right-wing Republicans like DeSantis are attacking our rights, trying to rip them away. The things that we fought, that our foremothers and forefathers and for others fought for to start winning trans liberation and queer liberation.

The Democrats trot out a statement every six months or so. They might hold an event at the White House by invitation only during Pride Month, but they're not fighting for our rights. They're not doing anything practical, much less decisive to push back these attacks, even though they have the reins of government. But in Cuba, which is demonized by both the

Republicans and Democrats and by the whole capitalist state machine, our rights are being advanced. And that makes me more determined than ever to come back and educate our communities about the advances Cuba is making and how it's able to do that through its socialist revolution.

Because in Cuba, the working class holds power, not the rich and powerful capitalist class like in the United States. And that is why they're able to do things like the Families Code, which is the most advanced in the world. It's because the people truly hold power there. That's a big task for us to undertake and understand, but it also should give us hope that another world is possible. And for me, that painful few hours sitting in the Miami airport, reflecting on all of these contradictions between the U.S. and Cuba, really fueled my determination to fight the blockade, to fight the state sponsors of terrorism list, to bring more queer people, more queer organizations to Cuba to see for themselves, and also to intensify our fight here in the U.S. for our communities.

And I'm happy to say that we in Women in Struggle, and several of the other organizations involved in our delegation, as well as others, are working together to build a national march to protect trans youth and a speak out for trans lives on the weekend of Oct. 7 in Orlando, Florida, to bring the fight to DeSantis, to bring the fight to the fascists and take up the example of Stonewall – of Marsha, of Sylvia, of Leslie Feinberg, of Queer Nation, and ACT UP and of our Cuban siblings who are continuing their revolutionary process by advancing queer rights and the rights of all people.

So now we'd like to get any questions folks have or comments, questions for the panelists, questions in the Q&A. Okay, here we go. The first question is "did you go to the ballet in Cuba or other arts events? How would you describe how they are different in Cuba than in the U.S.?" That's a great question. Serena, you want to go first?

Serena Sojic-Borne: Yeah, I can speak to that. Not all of us were able to attend, but Melinda and I got the pleasure to go to the National Gala Against Homophobia and Transphobia and I think it was at least the seventh one. It might've been the 11th, something like that. They've been

doing this every year for a while now. It's this huge, huge performance in Havana in the largest, most prestigious theater in the entire country, the National Theater of Cuba.

And there's this slogan, we didn't talk about it so much during the panel, but the slogan that has been going around in Cuba is "love is the law," right? Because ever since the passage of the Families Code – Melinda's showing off a tote bag with the slogan, "for all families, love is the law." Right. And when I first saw that, I thought, okay, that's a cute slogan. But throughout the movement in Cuba, people take that to heart very seriously and the cultural and artistic performances really reinforce it and work to make sure that people completely understand all the implications of love is the law.

At this theater they had skits. One was about a small farming family and the father was not accepting of the gay son, and they have conflict at the dinner table. And then someone comes in and proclaims, "did you hear about the passage of the new Families Code? Love is the law now in Cuba." And at the end everyone is embracing each other, like, oh my "God, love is the law."

All these relationships are important, right? In the U.S., when we have anti-LGBTQ laws, that promotes bigotry in families. And in Cuba, it's the other way around And so the cultural performances are really important, but it wasn't just theater skits.

There was the National Ballet of Cuba and they had these great dances that were really moving because they depicted scenes of love, of same-sex love, but also of conflict. There were these performances where people were sort of dancing and fighting with each other, but then dancing and embracing each other. That was really some amazing performance art. And at one point, about halfway through the performance, there was a spotlight on an audience member who just stood up and started playing the saxophone, and then a spotlight on another audience member who stood up and started playing their instrument. And then it turns out 15 people in the audience were members of a brass band, and they all stood up and started playing music. And then everybody in the audience just stood up and started dancing.

And everyone in Cuba knows how to dance, right? They showed us a few moves actually at the Pride parade, the Conga Against Homophobia and Transphobia. And throughout it, people were singing, "love is the law, love is the law." You know? And there were mambo dancers and all this.

And to talk about some differences with the U.S., on top of the fact that the performances were political and progressive and reinforced the message of equality for everyone, to go to the theater, the cost of admission for a ticket is the equivalent of 36 cents in the U.S. All those incredible performances, drag shows, you know, mambo and everything. I mean, I will go see a bad cover band at a bar and pay a $15 cover charge to get into the bar. But for the same cost as bubblegum here, you can get all that in Cuba. So I really appreciate the question about culture. The party and the LGBTQ movement really reinforce the cultural transformation in Cuba.

Melinda Butterfield: Thank you, Serena. Would anyone else from the delegation like to talk about our night out at the drag show? If not, I will. On the Friday night before the Conga, a bunch of us went to a queer club that was recommended to us, a queer club. But they had this very well-regarded drag show late in the evening. And we went, we got dressed up. Some of us, more than others! We went and had drinks and hung around until the show started. And it was really amazing and lovely. There were a lot of gay men and a lot of trans women there and a smattering of other constituencies of the community.

But I think it was a really, really wonderful night. It was so welcoming and everyone was having a great time. People were being called up to the stage by the performers. Some of us even tried to dance amidst all the chairs. We had a good time. So there's a lot of life happening. It's not just politics, but it's also politics entwined with living life to the fullest for the queer community.

Here is a question from our friend from Florida: Lizz Toledo mentions the Cuban revolutionary spirit and how important it is. How can that revolutionary spirit and education be fostered in a similar level here in the United States?" Great question. Lizz, do you want to tackle that?

Lizz Toledo: Yes, thank you for the wonderful question. As I and Melinda also mentioned, when coming back to the States it's such a contrast. It just hits you at every turn. You see something and say, "wow, that will never happen in Cuba." And so in building that revolutionary spirit and continuing that process, that is the work we revolutionaries must do. And it is the fight for socialist revolution here in the United States that will most help the Cuban people and other oppressed people of the world is to fight here in the United States for socialist revolution. And the reality is that the people are there. The people are there and are ready.

But what's needed is a unified vanguard organization and party that will be able to continue the process that Gregory was talking about, and to build that here in the U.S. It's never over. Every little bit that anybody can do is helpful. Every little bit that anybody can do with unity and non-sectarianism among our organizations – among our socialist organizations here in the U.S. I think that we can begin to build that revolutionary spirit.

Anything that anybody can do is critical – showing up to the march, going to support our siblings in Florida. Because they are really being beaten down not just in Florida, but as Serena mentioned, in New Orleans and other places around the country.

Some of us live in states – not me – but some people live in states where it is unheard of for laws (or we thought that it would be unheard of for laws) against LGBTQ folks to be passed, you know, and it's happening. And rather than get demoralized as, admittedly, I was getting, let's look at the spirit of the Cuban people and the revolutionary spirit of the Cuban people that continues under horrendous, horrendous oppression from the United States.

They still continue to fight they still continue to build. And the process also includes this friendship. Gregory, when you read that, you know what came to me is, as she was talking about "come to the house and have coffee because they want to stop this process" – it's also this process of friendship between working people around the world. This process of coming together and uniting and stop fighting for crumbs and stop begging for crumbs and just come together and fight together because together we're so strong. Together we can defeat this imperialist monster.

That process of friendship, love, unity, support, encouragement, and all of that is what I mean by the revolutionary spirit, and how we might be able to build it here. Lastly, my favorite quote of Che Guevara is that the true nature of a revolutionary, and the true revolutionary is inspired by great feelings of love, great feelings of love for the people. So all of that is what I mean by revolutionary spirit, and how we can build it in the U.S.

Melinda Butterfield: Thanks, Lizz. Another question from Florida, "What can U.S. organizers learn from Cuba, and specifically their restorative justice approach?"

Jordan David: Firstly, there's the aspect of building a culture around community, and Lizz was speaking to this. In Cuba, you don't necessarily have to go to a bar or restaurant to find a sense of community. People literally just go outside their home, and their community is there, congregating.

Everybody knows each other in a community. And that in itself provides a form of safety, right and you know you know that your community is physically there to take care of you. So, you know, kind of building that culture here and getting in the practice of, like, talking to your neighbors and knowing people and building sort of networks of people that take care of each other. I think is really important. And I think when we're talking about doing it here, and it has to go further than that right you have to really materially take care of each other, because we don't have like universal housing and healthcare and all these things in place. So we have to step in, pending revolution right. What we really need is a revolution, but pending revolution.

We have to step in as a community and fill in those needs that are not being provided by the state, and also do damage control when we're in crisis. When our comrades were brutalized and arrested at Pride, we had already built the activist community – these overlapping networks of care and mutual aid throughout that community. So we were able to come together and do lots of different things. Waiting outside the jail all night, so that when this person was released, they weren't just thrown out onto the street at four in the morning with nothing and nowhere to go. They're being welcomed into their community; they're being

wrapped in love and care. They have somewhere to go. They have arrived.

In a weekend, we raised like $10,000. You would think it was magic but it's not magic. It's the power of community. We don't want this person to wait for a court date or even just one more day. We're going to get them out now. There are many different ways of being able to make folks comfortable through networks of people that are in the habit of taking care of each other. So, yeah, a culture of care and practice of care.

Kiana Fok: Yeah, I was gonna say mutual aid as well and get that word out there. As Jordan said, get to know your neighbors and organize with them. There are many ways to help people out. Also spreading awareness, including about history. Talk about the labor struggles for inspiration and learn from them while working at the local level.

This ties back to getting to know your neighbors, being there for them and also organizing, especially at the local level, such as fighting to get back our public lands. And by supporting workers, especially when they're on strike and just be more involved in your local community.

Lizz Toledo: Thank you, Kiana. You know, the way that the justice – the injustice – system works in the United States, it's completely different from the way that things are done in Cuba in terms of restorative justice. But there are places in the U.S. that are beginning to implement restorative justice methods in some communities.

Specifically I know about some restorative justice programs that have to do with domestic violence and sexual assault, where the community holds the offender accountable. And it's a system of justice that's not about punishing, it's more about the restoration of an individual, and the welcoming back of an individual into a community after they have violated some community norm.

And working towards that involves the whole community. So, yeah, that would be a wonderful thing to begin implementing all over the U.S., not just in some of the places where people are beginning to try to do some restorative justice programs, but to be able to take over the whole criminal injustice system in the United States and implement a system equal to that of Cuba.

Melinda Butterfield: Another question, "are there TERFs in Cuba, and if so, how are they dealt with?" I'll say that in our discussions with the various networks of the queer communities there, "TERF" specifically never came up. TERFs are the so-called trans exclusionary radical feminists, which is a misnomer, because they're not radical and they're not feminists. They're basically a wing of the fascist movement at this point.

We see them a lot in the U.S. and England, people claiming to be speaking for women, while attacking trans people. And we didn't hear anything specifically about that existing in Cuba but what we did learn about were the fundamentalist Christian groups that get support and funding from the United States, pushing an anti-trans, anti-women, anti-queer agenda and how those organizations are not permitted to carry out the kind of violent or threatening active street activities that they do here.

Jordan David: So, apart from our itinerary, I did go out into communities every single day, and just talk to folks who weren't like officials of any kind. And one of the conversations I had was with a man who was, you know, older, very masculine presenting, and he talked about the transformation that he had experienced of people's views of queer people in general. And he praised the revolution for its education. And he talked about how he remembers when there was a time when machismo was so prevalent throughout the culture. And he said that through education, it's been sort of conditioned out. I don't want to make a claim that machismo is completely gone from Cuba, but this man who's lived it, this is what he was saying – the view of queer people, in general, in Cuba is like, they're cool with it now.

Throughout all the conversations I had, I haven't heard any kind of sentiment of people being TERFs, definitely. So I don't, I don't know if that's a thing, but that was based on just the experience that I had.

Melinda Butterfield: Another question, "how do we bring back the knowledge of how supportive Cuba is for LGBTQ+ communities and counter the corporate propaganda that affects many people's ideas of what the revolution is in reality?" That's a really good question. And it really is the motivating force behind this delegation that we organized. It was an

effort to bring together, first of all, different groups, and a spirit of unity and solidarity with Cuba and the LGBTQ struggle, to go on this delegation together and share the experience, and then to come back and report on what we found.

So, what we're doing tonight is one small example of that process and there are local report backs being planned. New Orleans has one on the 22nd of June. We're doing some in Southern California, in San Diego and Los Angeles in July, and there are other activities coming up. But also, I think that it's really important to get out the word to our communities about the Families Code. I think, as folks said earlier, when it was reported – if it was reported at all in the capitalist media last year when it happened, when the referendum was passed – it was just, "oh, Cuba has finally gotten around to adopting same sex marriage."

But the Families Code is so much bigger than that, and so much more comprehensive, and not only for the queer community, but for all families and all kinds of communities in Cuba. Because Cuba understands that giving people more rights doesn't take away rights from other people. The way that it's portrayed here, it's always like they try to set us against each other, like, "oh, well, if the queers get more rights, then you are going to have fewer rights."

And that's simply not the case. In Cuba, they don't play that game with people. They're representing the people, and so it's clear to folks that expanding people's rights is to benefit everyone, to benefit society. So, you know, Women in Struggle, at our website, *womeninstruggle.org*, we have a newsletter about the Families Code that you can download and print and share. Other organizations have done articles about it. Fight Back! News, Struggle - La Lucha, Lavender News, and other outlets have had articles written by the delegates from this trip, talking about different aspects of the Families Code. So we really need to get out the word about those things and start really combating the anti-Cuba propaganda in our communities.

Lizz Toledo: You know, whenever African American groups talk about reparations in the United States, what they get is a lot of pushback, a lot

of repression, a lot of attacks. I was reminded of that in many, many aspects throughout my visit to Cuba. You know, oftentimes in the United States, people raise this whole thing – especially some members of the LGBTQ community, my community – that, well, Cuba used to put people with AIDS or people with HIV in camps.

And you know what? As I think Jordan and other people mentioned, Cubans are not saying that they're doing everything perfectly and right. But the difference is that when they recognize that they've made a mistake, they repair it. They work towards making it right. Because nobody knew what AIDS was, nobody knew what was going on, there were people with HIV who were put in sanitariums – I wouldn't call them concentration camps. They were kept away from the population and not allowed to work. Reparations are being made to those same people today, in terms of the health care they receive, because they don't have a pension as a result of not having been able to work. They get a pension because they didn't pay into the system all these years that they were unable to work. They still get health care, they still get housing, they get all their needs met.

When has the United States ever made any reparations to any oppressed community that they have oppressed in the history of the United States? When have they made reparations towards the LGBT community during the AIDS epidemic here? When have they made reparations to all the people, millions of people who died from COVID? When have they made reparations for slavery? When have they made reparations to the Chinese and the Asian community when they did put them in concentration camps? When have they ever thought about making it right with any of the communities that they have ever oppressed?

They have never admitted to any wrongs. That is not Cuba. Cuba will acknowledge when they made mistakes, and they will move towards changing them. And that's the kind of information that we need to give to anybody in the U.S. who wants to continue to just believe the anti-Cuba propaganda that is being put out. So, ¡Viva Fidel, Viva Che!

Melinda Butterfield: One more question, "for those of us fighting for trans and queer liberation here in the empire, is there something we can learn from the Cuban example for fighting against chauvinism?"

Serene Sojic-Born: I like the way you phrased the question about chauvinism. There's two kinds of chauvinism, right? There's chauvinism among the people, and there's the entrenched chauvinism of the ruling class – of the capitalist ruling class. One has billions of dollars and one doesn't. One is ready to mobilize people, like the billionaire ruling class is ready to mobilize people to repress LGBTQ rights to fulfill their economic interests, to fulfill their ideological ambitions of what they call traditional family values, basically conservative family values.

And then there's chauvinism among just ordinary people who have backwards ideas and they need to be educated to get those backwards ideas removed, right? And in the U.S., the liberals and Democrats who lead the struggle against oppression, against LGBTQ people, the way they do it is by acting like that education bit is what we need all the way up the ladder. By acting like it's all the same kind of chauvinism, right? It's all the same kind of bigotry. If we just had better educated politicians, if we just had people at the top in the White House, in Congress who are friendly to LGBTQ people, we'll have progress, right?

And we've seen that that's not true. We've seen that even when there are Democrats in office, they don't grow a spine. And they don't defend LGBTQ rights because that's not what benefits their corporate sponsors. That's not what helps their bottom line. What Cuba understands, what the Communist Party of Cuba understands, is that it needs to fight against chauvinism. It needs to fight against bigotry against LGBTQ people while also having a zero tolerance for imperialism and for capitalism. And those two go together because any entrenchment of U.S. imperialism, capitalism, these are forces that will help revive bigotry and that'll help bigots be stronger.

We've seen this with the fact that U.S. imperialism is funding the evangelical groups in Cuba. And imperialism is also trying to recruit

from Cenesex – to play the soft side, like the liberal side. This is to defang Cenesex and to take their activists and bring them around on speaking tours throughout the U.S. and take them away from actually doing things for Cuba.

So what Cuba has is a working-class line and a working class organization that is ready to take the approach that's needed to fight day-to-day chauvinism, which is the approach of unity, struggle, unity, right? We're here, we're in the same fight, we're here together, we're unified, but we're going to struggle with each other to get rid of these bad ideas to return to a place of higher unity. And then the same Communist Party of Cuba, the same working class line, when it confronts the chauvinism of the ruling class is ready to take up the position of class struggle. When confronting the ruling class, we're not here to educate, we're here to fight.

And in the U.S., I think to kind of toot our horn in Louisiana a little bit, the Real Name Campaign is a good example of this. We need organizations that are ready to mobilize the masses of LGBTQ people to do education, to support the LGBTQ community, and to put up a fight when it comes to going up against both the Republicans and the spineless Democrats. That's a working class line. That's when the working class, the people who don't have any interest in keeping capitalism alive, lead socialism and lead the movement.

Gregory E. Williams: First, I have an anecdote that's similar to one Jordan already expressed. But at one point on the trip, at Cenesex, we met with delegates from the neighborhood assemblies. This is the bread and butter, most local level of government in Cuba. They aren't professional politicians in the sense that we have in the U.S., but rather people who are still living in their own communities, working class people. And that is true even of the national government, even in the National Assembly of People's Power, which is like the Cuban version of the U.S. Congress.

So if you're a doctor, or a school teacher or construction worker, you can be elected by your peers in your neighborhood to represent them.

And you don't get a salary for that, the way our professional political class does. One of the delegates we met with was an older man who was masculine presenting. I remember he said, you know, in relation to the changing views in society and all these kinds of questions about chauvinism and so on, he said, "I surprised myself about how different my thinking is today versus how it was when I was young in the '70s. That's how much I've changed – so much that I surprised myself."

And that's through the kind of process that's happened in Cuba, the revolutionary process. They have the institutions where they can debate these things and come to new understandings. We don't have the type of socialist system that Cuba has, unfortunately, not yet anyway. But to echo other comrades, I do think that the biggest thing that's going to change people's attitudes is the struggle. When you actually get people together on a picket line, workers – white and Black, immigrant, people who were born here, gay, straight, trans – there's a change that occurs when people fight together.

And it has a ripple effect in society. When others who aren't directly involved in that, when they see the struggle, when they see solidarity, that changes people probably more than any education that we can do – and the education piece is very important, that's why we're having this forum tonight, because education is important. But the actual struggle, if we organize and are rock solid in our commitment to each other, that is, serious about the idea that an injury to one is an injury to all, we're going to show up, regardless of whether we're directly impacted and it's "our" community quote-unquote – it's all our community. I might not be an immigrant, but I'm going to show up for immigrants' rights. That's the kind of attitude that we have to have and not let anybody who might attach themselves to the movement try to pick us off from one another and say, "oh, well, why are you, why are you supporting that," you know, we can't accept any kind of division like that. We have to be very solid and firm in that commitment, and I think that's going to change people's minds and hearts.

Deirdre Deans: I am truly looking forward to going back to Cuba, because I had a great experience. And I also feel like when we were at

those meetings and conferences that they were talking directly to me, and that I am definitely supposed to be a part of this organization. So, I definitely would like to become a part of this group.

And I'm just looking forward to really getting involved. I'm really looking forward to getting involved. I just feel like it's a calling for me, being there for the first time and actually experiencing that. Because I always hear my partner, you know, talk back to the TV and all and now I know why. I know why. I'm definitely looking forward to becoming a part of the organization with all you wonderful great comrades, and just becoming more informed, because I learned a lot. I learned so much, and I was so shocked.

And when I think about Cuba, I'm just like in la la land, like, wow. It's really happening. This can really happen. So, yeah, I'm just looking forward to becoming a part of the organization and meeting up with everyone more often, and thank you for allowing me to participate today.

Melinda Butterfield: Thank you Dee and thank you everyone. I'm going to make a few announcements so please stick around just a moment. I'm going to make a segue, because we were invited by the Institute for Cuban Friendship with the Peoples and Cenesex to come back and do this again. And we want to bring more of our queer communities and our activists to see for themselves what's really happening in Cuba.

Of course there are a lot of other great Cuba solidarity trips too that you can go on. Check out the National Network on Cuba website for some of those [*https://nnoc.org/*]. June 25th is a national day of action and solidarity with Cuba to get Cuba off the list, off the state sponsor of terrorism list, where Trump put them back on and Biden has kept them on. Which intensifies the blockade in so many ways. There's going to be a demonstration in Washington, where representatives of our delegation are going to be speaking. There's going to be a demonstration in Los Angeles, and in other cities around the country so please plug into that if you can.

I want to remind people also of the National March to Protect Trans Youth that we're helping to organize in Orlando, Florida this fall to

reverse DeSantis' attacks and all the attacks around the country because it's spreading out from there everywhere. And we need your help, we need your participation and input to make this thing happen. Go to *protecttranskidsmarch.org* and sign up, endorse, get involved. We have bi-weekly organizing calls that you can participate in.

We have leaflets and other material that you can get out at Pride marches and other events. And with that, I believe we're going to call it a night. Thank you so much everyone for your participation.

Greetings from Cuba: Message of solidarity to the U.S. LGBTQ+ community

Lesmes Bonachea Aylen *Oct. 7, 2023*

On the day of the National March to Protect Trans Youth – held on Oct. 7 in Orlando, Florida – the U.S. Friends Against Homophobia and Transphobia Delegation received this solidarity message from our friend, Aylen, at Norteamérica ICAP.

Greetings from Cuba, a country that is advancing in the defense and deepening of equal opportunity rights for homosexuals and transsexuals. It is a privilege for me to learn about social problems you face on a daily basis.

Our struggles will be guided by achieving full rights for all people. That is why we defend the right to solidarity, respect, and tolerance. We reject the imposition of patriarchal dogmas, discrimination, and transgression of personal rights. We defend – as a right – the access to health and education without discrimination based on sexual orientation, skin color, social or religious status.

The right to health constitutes a fundamental right for all human beings.

I am an advocate for all social justice for all people, which also depends on respect for free and responsible sexual orientation and gender identity.

Cuba is moving forward in the implementation of the Family Code. We know that law alone does not achieve transformation. But in Cuba, love is the law.

A hug, and let us continue in struggle.

Lesmes Bonachea Aylen, *Norteamérica ICAP*

North American Division of the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples

NATIONAL MARCH
To Protect Trans Youth
& Speakout for Trans Rights
Orlando ▸ Florida ▸ October 7
Orange & Anderson (near City Hall)
Saturday at 12 Noon
Stop Racist Attacks on Our Communities
▸ Reverse DeSantis's bans on trans healthcare, restroom access, Black & Queer studies
▸ Stop censorship & attacks on civil liberties of teachers, students & libraries
▸ Hands off Pride!
▸ Free, legal, accessible abortions
▸ Demand Biden & Congress enforce civil rights coast to coast
▸ Expand Medicaid and SNAP
▸ Stop voter disenfranchisement
▸ Drop charges on the Tampa 5
Sign up at: ProtectTransKidsMarch.org

Un saludo desde Cuba: un mensaje de solidaridad a la comunidad LGBTQ+ en EE.UU.

Por Lesmes Bonachea Aylen *7 de octubre*

El día de la Marcha Nacional para Proteger a la Juventud Trans – celebrada el 7 de octubre en Orlando, Florida – la Delegación de Amigos Estadounidenses Contra la Homofobia y la Transfobia recibió este mensaje de solidaridad de nuestra amiga Aylen, en Norteamérica ICAP.

Un saludo afectuoso desde Cuba, país que avanza en la defensa y profundización de los derechos por la igualdad de oportunidades para homosexuales y transexuales. Es un privilegio conocer los problemas sociales que enfrentan ustedes en la vida diaria.

Nuestras luchas están guiadas siempre por alcanzar todos los derechos para todas las personas. Por eso, defendemos los derechos de la solidaridad, el respeto, y la tolerancia. Rechazamos la imposición de dogmas patriarcales, la discriminización, la transgresión, de los derechos personales. Defendemos – como derecho – el acceso a la salud y la educación sin discriminaciones por orientación sexual, color de la piel, estatus social o religioso.

El derecho a la salud constituye un derecho fundamental de todos los seres humanos.

Soy defensora de todas las justicias sociales para todas las personas, que dependen también del respeto a la libre responsable orientación sexual e identidad de género.

Cuba avanza en la implementación de un Código de las Familias. Sabemos que solo la ley no lo logra. Pero, las transformaciones con el amor son posibles.

Un abrazo, seguimos en lucha.

Lesmes Bonachea Aylen, *Norteamérica ICAP*

División Norteamericana del Instituto Cubano de Amistad con los Pueblos

MARCHA NACIONAL POR LA Protección de la Juventud Trans

Orange y Anderson
(cerca del Ayuntamiento)
Orlando, Florida

SÁBADO
7 DE OCTUBRE
12 mediodía

DETENER LOS ATAQUES RACISTAS EN NUESTRAS COMUNIDADES

- **Quitar las prohibiciones de DeSantis sobre atención médica para personas trans, acceso a baños, y la estudios negros y queer**
- **Detener la censura y los ataques a las libertades civiles de profesores, alumnos, bibliotecas**
- **NO Toquen a Pride**
- **Abortos gratuitos, legales y accesibles**
- **Exija que Biden y el Congreso hagan cumplir los derechos civiles de costa a costa**
- **Expandir Medicaid y SNAP**
- **Detener la privación de derechos de los votantes**
- **Quitar los cargos de los Tampa 5**

¡Involucrarse!
Agrega tu organización

Regístrese en: ProtectTransKidsMarch.org | MujeresEnLucha.org

Lista parcial de patrocinadorix (lista en formación): Women in Struggle-Mujeres en Lucha; Queer Youth Assemble; PRISM, South Florida; Chritynne Lili Wrene Wood, 2023 San Diego Champion of Pride; Orlando Come Out with Pride; Center for Constitutional Rights; Equality Florida; Tampa Bay Community Action Committee; Real Name Campaign, NOLA; Pride At Work Eastern Massachusetts; The Queer Notion, Tampa; Transpired Media; Louisiana Women's Rights Action Committee; Red Berets for Queers; United American Indians of New England; Andre Powell, ret. delegate, Baltimore CLC, AFL-CIO*; Baltimore Peoples Power Assembly; Harriet Tubman Center for Social Justice, Los Angeles; PFLAG Safety Harbor; Zebra Youth. **Solo Para identificación*

CONTACTO LOCAL:

Labor donato

Reports from Havana:

Despite U.S. blockade, Cuba has 90% vaccinated, opens to world visitors

Struggle - La Lucha 2021 Cuba delegation *Nov. 17, 2021*

Lars Bertling, Ellie McClain and Sharon Black, three reporters for Struggle-La Lucha, members of the Struggle for Socialism Party, and representatives of the Baltimore Peoples Power Assembly are participating in the 31st U.S.-Cuba IFCO-Pastors for Peace Friendshipment Caravan.

Havana – It was an all day ordeal on Monday, Nov. 15, on the U.S. side. We waited in grueling airport security lines and spent hours checking in. Two of our representatives barely got their passports. We had to get up at 5 a.m. and drive to the passport office in Miami and keep our fingers crossed.

But when we got to Cuba it was all worth it.

On landing our spirits soared and our energy returned. Cuban people and their leaders were waiting at the airport, along with a bevy of news media. Our group was literally the first delegation to travel to the newly opened Cuba, which had been closed to international visitors because of the pandemic. Nov. 15 was the opening of schools and services in Cuba and is also a day celebrating the anniversary of Havana.

When we got to the Cuban Martin Luther King Center (yes, there is such a thing) young Cuban singers and musicians greeted us along with local Marianao community and political leaders and representatives of the MLK Center.

Today, Tuesday, was our first whole day of learning and visiting. Our entire group was large, over 70 people, so we split up.

Memorial de la Denuncia

Most people living in the U.S. only equate terrorism with the 9/11 attacks. It's a sad hypocrisy. Far more Cuban people, many who are young children, have died in terrorist attacks. Only, these attacks were perpetrated by the Pentagon, CIA, the right wing, and U.S. imperialism.

This state-of-the art, modern museum documents those countless attacks.

The entrance has a revolving, updated count of the number of people who have lost their lives to terrorism. This does not cover those impacted by the blockade but strictly through bombings and violent acts of terrorism. Today the count is 3,476.

There were 637 (known) attempts to assassinate Fidel; 21 CIA air raids; 11 CIA bombings; and 581 terrorist attacks aimed at Cuban missions overseas.

A special film documents the March 4, 1960, bombing of the French freighter La Coubre in the Havana port and the loss of 110 lives. Fidel and Che lead the massive street marches to honor those who lost their lives and to defy U.S. imperialism. The families of the victims still mourn their loss.

Terrorist and CIA agent Luis Posada and his accomplices, who were all sheltered in the U.S., bragged of the cowardly bombing of Cubana Flight 455 on Oct. 6, 1976, killing all 73 passengers, many Cuban children and all 24 members of a youth sports team that had just won every gold medal in the Central American and Caribbean Championships.

There seemed to be no end to the U.S. war on Cuba: from Operation Peter Pan that kidnapped 14,000 Cuban children over a two-year span from 1960 to 1963 and later in 2000, the kidnapping of Elián González. The U.S. also carried out biological warfare against Cuba, including the destruction of the pig industry and the sabotage of agricultural crops.

These are just a few examples.

The Memorial will grip your heart and change your view on who the real terrorists are.

Finlay Vaccine Institute

Our next stop was the Vaccine Institute which helped produce three Cuban COVID-19 vaccines: Soberana, Soberana 2 and Soberana Plus.

So many things stood out in the discussion and presentation by the representatives of the institute.

Under the most difficult conditions due to the blockade, Cuba was able to produce these three highly effective vaccines, rivaling the effectiveness of U.S. vaccines. The blockade had prevented Cuba from importing the reagents necessary for the production of the vaccine. And international patent restrictions blocked Cuban scientists from sharing important information.

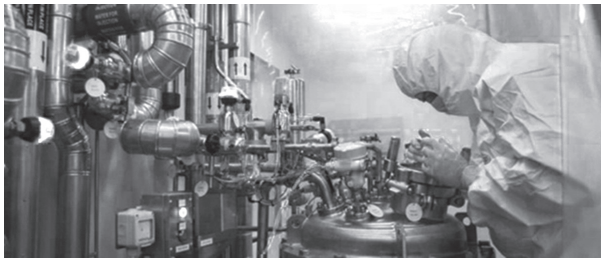
In addition, it was nearly the first time that Cuba had to produce a vaccine aimed at a virus (not a bacterial infection) and they were able to do it in a very short time. So you might consider it a miracle.

So how did they do it?

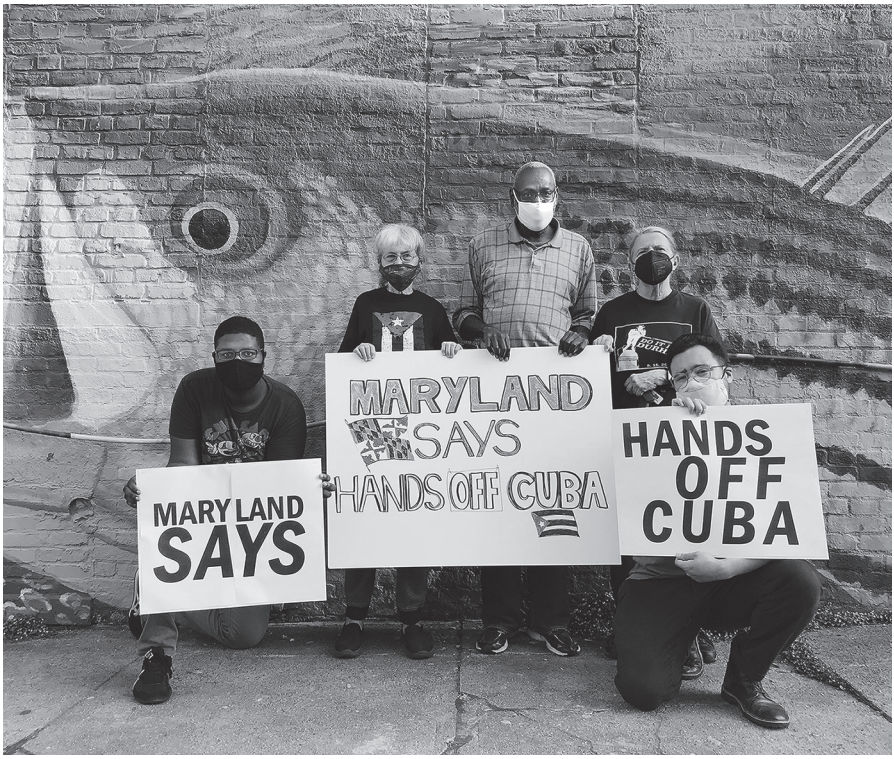
One of the major reasons given was the cooperation between Cuban organizations, the lack of competition and personal profit. In fact, these were some of the same reasons, along with a few others, for the high vaccination rate in Cuba that has now reached an astounding 90% of the population.

At this moment children under 2 years of age are not being vaccinated, so given that 90% includes all the population, the percentage of vaccinations among those who are eligible is even higher.

The people of Cuba trust the vaccines because the country has a long history of preventative health care that is steeped in education and community implementation. There is no profit requirement to block health care in Cuba.



The Finlay Vaccine Institute produced Cuban COVID-19 vaccines.The U.S. blockade prevented Cuba from importing elements needed to produce vaccines and needles used for injection.



Members of the Struggle for Socialism Party, and representatives of the Baltimore Peoples Power Assembly participated in the 31st U.S.-Cuba IFCO-Pastors for Peace Friendshipment Caravan in November 2021.

SLL Report two from Havana, Nov. 19 2021:
Fidel Castro Center, a profound experience

The account from day three. We were honored to be the first delegation to visit the Fidel Castro Ruz Center in Havana. It's important to share a small part of the background on the establishment of this museum and interactive teaching facility.

It was Fidel's wish that there would be no statutes, monuments or streets named for him. The "Comandante," as he is affectionately referred to here, knew his importance as a leader and teacher of the Cuban people and the international community. But his emphasis was always on the people.

Statues don't usually pass on ideas. Rather, it is an educated and organized people who do.

It must have been very hard for the Cuban people to abide by his wishes. However, the National Assembly, which is the equivalent of Congress in the U.S. – but much more representative of the people – passed a law that no statues of Fidel could be erected or streets named after him.

So it took a full debate and vote by the Cuban National Assembly to allow this one exemption, the Fidel Castro Ruz Center. And it's wonderful that they did.

The Center is a tribute to Cuba's history. A hectare of gardens (about two and a half acres) surrounds the converted home of an aristocrat that was confiscated by the revolution in 1959.

The gardens were developed to reflect Fidel's commitment to nature and ecology. There is no way to fully describe the beauty of this garden. Plants from the Sierra Maestra mountains are grown in a vertical garden with an exquisite waterfall, representing the mountains where the guerrilla army was based.

Guides explained that the modern bronze sculpture sitting near the center of the garden represented a species of tree that bends in the hurricanes. Raul Castro, Fidel's brother and also a leader of the revolution, described the tree as representing Fidel's ability to weather storms.

While we surveyed the garden, a white dove flew to the top of the bronze statue and stayed until a light rain began.

Our tour of the inside was a profound experience of Fidel's history starting as a boy until his death. It illustrated all the important aspects of Cuban history.

Nothing was left out, starting with a display of the jeep that Fidel used before he entered Havana in January 1959, dressed in the clothes he wore in the mountains. Our Cuban guide, a young Afro-Cuban, was profoundly knowledgeable.

Inclusion of children, people with disabilities

What struck us was the Center's thoughtful accessibility to children and those with disabilities of all kinds. Every exhibit, especially those that were interactive, allowed children and those using wheelchairs to access them through touch and voice, including QR codes.

This was true in the library area and also outside in the garden.

The use of digital technology, art, film, and sound was astounding. For instance, the library section featured facsimiles of books that could be scanned to reveal their contents. Throughout parts of the center you could view modern sculptures and displays. Special rooms were dedicated to audiovisual films and displays.

The detailed preservation of history and excellence in execution reflect the love of Fidel and the pride that Cuban people have in their history of resistance to imperialist domination. Included in these displays is the tremendous international support carried out by Cuba from Angola to Vietnam.

The accessibility of the museum is a testament to the Cubans' dedication to the next generation, and this is also shown in the detailed preservation of history. The Center contains more details than you could imagine, presented in a digestible way. Visiting is like reading several books on Cuban history.

We were unable to take photographs, as is common in museums that contain delicate displays, but especially because the Cubans do not want anyone to profit from or sell the images. Nevertheless, the Cubans plan to eventually create a special website for the Center that will be shared internationally.

Our delegation spent close to 4 hours at the Center and there was not a single person who was not deeply moved.

‘My Gift to Cuba’:
Baltimore socialists’ contribution to festival

Struggle - La Lucha 2021 Cuba delegation *Nov. 23, 2021*

On Nov. 20, the Friendshipment Caravan delegates and their hosts held a festival of experience called “My Gift to Cuba,” with contributions from each state participating in the caravan. This was our contribution:

We are from Baltimore, Maryland, where the police murder of Freddie Gray sparked a rebellion of the people of our city who were fed up with racist police terror.

Our delegation represents the Peoples Power Assembly, which does community work, including setting up weekly free food distributions because our government won’t feed the people, and also a “saving lives campaign” to demand vaccines for our community.

Among our own organizers, six people contracted COVID-19, four were hospitalized, and six other volunteers died. Only 60% of the people of Baltimore are vaccinated.

We know the Cubans like to say, “We are not perfect.” But what we have seen and will take back is heaven to us in comparison to our conditions under capitalism.

We want to add that we are also writers from Struggle-La Lucha and members of the Struggle for Socialism Party. Our young comrades have a poem they wrote and a t-shirt to present as our gift.

Sharon Black, Ellie McClain and Lars Bertling.

Cuba you've welcomed us
Like an old friend
But soon comes the day
When our time here will end
We'll venture back home
A capitalist hell
But we'll breathe revolution
As did Comrade Fidel
You're a socialist project
That's been under attack.
And we're gonna show you
That we've got your back
Because your existence
Is no far-off dream
It's an ongoing process
Where the people are supreme.
So soon comes the day
When our time here will end.
Love and solidarity –
Until we meet again.
Viva Cuba!

Lars Bertling and Ellie McClain presented a poem and a tee shirt to their Cuban hosts

SLL Photo: Sharon Black

Chapter 6:

Baltimore Peoples Power Assembly's submission to the United Nations Human Rights Office of High Command UPR* Platform for Cuba

*** Universal Periodic Review**

PPA Individual UPR submission: CUBA

Introduction *April 2023*

1. The following submission in relation to Cuba is made by the Peoples Power Assembly. The submission addresses three aspects of Cuba's situation relevant to the 4th cycle of the universal periodic review. It is based on eyewitness observation by PPA representative, Sharon Black who traveled to Cuba as part of an educational trip sponsored by the IFCO-Pastors for Peace from November 15 to November 25 of 2021.

2. This submission addresses the human right to healthcare particularly during the Sars COVID pandemic; the democratic participation of Cuban citizens; and the advancements of women, gender minorities, children, youth, disabled and elderly Cubans outlined in the new Family Code. It will respond to Article V. Priorities and Obstacles in Cuba's Report in the 3rd cycle on pages 15 and 16: Article V. Cuba's Priorities in the Area of Human Rights.

Cuba and the human right to health care during the Sars COVID pandemic

3. November 17, 2021, Sharon Black, a retired registered nurse representing the PPA, was able to visit the Finlay Vaccine Institute and participate in a discussion with Ricardo Perez, International Relations for the Finlay Institute. The Finlay Vaccine Institute helped produce three Cuban COVID-19 vaccines: Soberana, Soberana 2 and Soberana Plus. Cuba later went on to produce five vaccines.

4. The development and production of these three vaccines were done under very difficult conditions due to the U.S. blockade that prevented Cuba from importing the reagents necessary to produce the vaccine. International patent restrictions at the time also blocked Cuban scientists from sharing important information.
5. In addition, it was nearly the first time that Cuba had to produce a vaccine aimed at a virus (not a bacterial infection) and they were able to do it in a very short time. Cuba launched the first mass COVID-19 vaccination campaign for children from two to 18 years old in September 2021.
6. Even without a prevailing mandatory vaccination, by November 2021, almost 10.2 million Cubans had received at least one dose of vaccine (practically 100% of the vaccine eligible population). Of these, over 9.2 million have received the second dose and 8.7 million Cubans (78%) have received the third dose. 82.1% of the total Cuban population (9.18 million people) has even completed the entire vaccination schedule (two doses of Soberana02 and one dose of SoberanaPlus or three doses of Abdala).

COVID 19 vaccination in Cuba June 2021.

7. This is not only a higher vaccination rate compared to other low-income countries around the world, where on an average, only 2.8 per cent of the population was vaccinated by the end of November. It is also a higher vaccination rate compared to developed countries in the global North. By November 2021, over 311,000 people had received a fourth vaccination. As scientific studies show, this Cuban vaccination scheme has a protective effect of 92.4 percent.
8. Cuba's containment of Sars COVID 19 was not limited to the vaccines but included an extensive education campaign, the use of masks, social distancing and hygiene.

9. What we witnessed in the community was a remarkable understanding and compliance with mask wearing. We observed and spoke with people in the Mariano Community which surrounds the Martin Luther King Center, on the outskirts of Havana. People of all ages were masked including those on bikes and people on foot. There was no presence of police or government officials enforcing compliance.
10. When asked why this was so, representatives from the Finlay Institute explained that science literacy was high in the population and that people trust doctors and health care workers. When asking community members in Mariano, the most common reasons expressed were that "they were protecting others from the virus" or that they were "protecting themselves". In addition, no one is forced to vaccinate, compliance is based on understanding.
11. Healthcare in Cuba focuses mainly on prevention and is highly decentralized. Each neighborhood has its own polyclinic and there is a strong bond of trust between the local population and health personnel. Since March 2020 almost 30,000 'contact tracers' have gone door to door, to the farthest corners of the island, to check each family to see if one of its members was infected.

Advancement in democratic process

12. Citizen participation is one of the most important markers of democracy. During our visit, the Cuban people were actively engaged in shaping the new Cuban Family Code.
13. Cuba's former Family Code was written in 1976 and was one of the only aspects not addressed by the 2019 Constitutional Reform. In 2018, during the discussions and meetings on constitutional changes, while opinions were divided, it was found that there was significant support for the recognition of marriage outside of the hetero-normative conception. The commission felt that it was something that needed more discussion with people.
14. Eventually, the National Assembly of People's Power decided to omit the definition of marriage because there was not full consensus, leaving it to be decided in the family code and not the constitution.

Nevertheless, marriage as a contract between two partners remained, without specifying the definition of the parties that are and are not allowed to enter it.

15. Following the approval of the new constitution in February 2019, the members of the drafting commission began working on a new Family Code. By September 22, 2021, versions of the new code were presented. In December 2021, the National Assembly approved the draft that was submitted for popular consultation in February 2022. Three months of popular consultation, in which 6,481,200 voters or 75.93 % of a total of 8,535,742 participated with 336,595 interventions in more than 79,000 meetings throughout Cuba, led to changes to 49.15% of the content of the draft. This draft, with suggestions from citizens, underwent a new evaluation by the National Assembly, and was unanimously approved in June.

16. As established in the Constitution, all citizens over 16 years of age are eligible to vote in the referendum. The new Code had to receive more than 50% of the valid votes in order to be applied as a law. According to the data issued by the CEN, 61% of those who were consulted on the referendum, expressed themselves in favor of the new code.

17. There were differences freely expressed by religious groupings inside of Cuba who did not want to change the traditional concept of the family as a man, woman and children – as opposed to people who represented families that could be considered non-traditional, i.e., same sex parents and children, or single parent and grandparent headed families. These opinions were expressed freely with no suppression of differences.

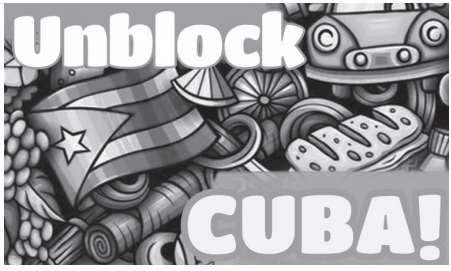
18. More than 4,000 proposals were made in the assemblies, many of which were incorporated into the final document. For example, a provision clarifying inheritance rights for same-sex marriages was incorporated from one of these discussions. In all, the new Code of Families went through 26 revisions before the final vote. Even as late as the 25th draft, there were 255 amendments.

19. The final version was voted on September 25, 2022. 74.01% or 6,251,786 of the total 8,447,467 eligible voters living in and outside of Cuba participated in this referendum. Eligible voters living outside of Cuba voted on September 15, 2022.
20. The process of consultation and participation of all sectors of Cuban society is one that should be studied and replicated by the global community. Advancements of women, gender minorities including the LGTBQ+ Cubans, children and youth, and elderly Cubans specifically outlined in the new Family Code
21. The Cuba Family Code was a cultural leap forward that codified new rights for women, LGTBQ+ Cuban, children and elderly. It has been described by experts as the most inclusive, progressive and revolutionary code in the world. It legalizes equal marriage and equal adoption rights regardless of sexual orientation, recognizes the rights of surrogate mothers, recognizes women's work in the household, and recognizes the role of grandparents in the family, among many more progressive victories.
22. The new code enacts sweeping advances in the rights of women, LGBTQ people, children, elderly people, and people with disabilities.
23. The Cuban Family Code guarantees the right of all people to form a family without discrimination, legalizing same sex marriage and allowing same sex couples to adopt children. Under this Code, parental rights will be shared among extended and non traditional family structures that could include grandparents, stepparents and surrogate mothers. The code also adds novelties such as prenuptial agreements and assisted reproduction.
24. The Code promotes equal distribution of domestic responsibilities amongst men and women and extends labor rights to those who care full-time for children, the elderly, or people with disabilities. The code establishes the right to a family life free from violence, one that values love, affection, solidarity and responsibility. It codifies domestic violence penalties and promotes comprehensive policies to address gender-based violence.

25. The Family Code outlaw's child marriage and corporal punishment, stating that parents will have "responsibility" instead of "custody" of children, and will be required to be "respectful of the dignity and physical and mental integrity of children and adolescents." It also asserts that parents should grant maturing offspring more say over their lives.
26. It expands the rights of the elderly and people with disabilities, recognizing the role of grandfathers and grandmothers in the transmission of values, culture, traditions and care.
27. This progress by the Cuban government is in sharp contrast to what is taking place in the United States where the rights of transgender people are being eroded by bans from Tennessee to Florida and where the U.S. Supreme Court struck down abortion rights.

Conclusions:

28. The sovereign nation of Cuba leads the way globally in guaranteeing human rights from healthcare to civil and political rights.
29. The U.S. blockade should be lifted as it hinders the continuing progress that the Cuban government and society has made in healthcare including developing medicines and treatments that Cuba could share with the world. It hinders the exchange of information on the landmark progress on participatory democracy and sharing the tremendous progress made by the new Family Code. The U.S. blockade directly harms Cuban society by creating shortages, stifling economic growth in violation of the sovereign rights of nations to determine their own destiny.



A global call for justice and resistance against imperialism

Gary Wilson and Lallan Schoenstein *May 5, 2024*

Guantánamo – An international peace seminar held in Guantánamo, Cuba, brought together delegates from 30 countries demanding a world free of U.S. imperialist intervention and military bases.

During the VIII International Seminar for Peace and the Abolition of Military Bases, participants echoed the international condemnation of Israel's genocide against the Palestinian people, demanded the return of Cuban territory occupied by the U.S. Naval Base at Guantánamo, and repudiated the wars organized by NATO under U.S. leadership. Fernando González Llort, President of the Cuban Institute of Friendship with Peoples (ICAP), emphasized that the seminar is being held amidst a complex global situation.

The seminar expressed solidarity with countries and peoples under occupation and colonial rule, such as Palestine, Western Sahara, and Puerto Rico.

Regarding the genocide committed against the Palestinian people by Israel, with the collaboration of the U.S. and the European Union, participants agreed that a comprehensive, just, and lasting solution requires the Palestinian people's right to self-determination.

Speakers highlighted the imperative to end NATO's expansionism and called for the dissolution of the aggressive military bloc. They also stressed

Fernando González Llort, President of the Cuban Institute of Friendship with Peoples (ICAP), speaking at the International Seminar for Peace and the Abolition of Military Bases. Speakers demanded the return of Cuban territory occupied by the U.S. Naval Base at Guantánamo.

the need to strengthen the anti-imperialist struggle and solidarity for a world of peace and social justice. Iraklis Tsavdaridis, executive secretary of the World Council for Peace (CMP), noted that the U.S. imperialist military presence and NATO are not only the source of the Russia-Ukraine war but also support Israel's genocide against Palestinians.

Delegates pointed out that the United States has over 900 military bases in 90 countries, with 1.3 million men and women in these military installations, making it the main promoter of wars worldwide. The U.S. Naval Base at Guantánamo, Cuba, established in 1902, is the oldest and first U.S. military base in Latin America. Its presence significantly affects the economy of Guantánamo province and causes environmental damage.

Voices of resistance

Murid Abukhater, a Palestinian medical student in Cuba, expressed gratitude for the international solidarity with the Palestinian cause and Cuba's unwavering support. He condemned the U.S. blockade against Cuba and demanded the closure of the Guantánamo Naval Base and the return of the territory to Cuban sovereignty.

During the last day of presentations, delegates discussed cyberwar and cyberterrorism as new weapons used by imperialism to undermine the sovereignty of nations. Speakers emphasized the need for Cuba to continue advancing in cybersecurity research and innovation, as the U.S. Naval Base in Guantánamo poses a real threat to the island. They also highlighted how cyber warfare is silently used to attack countries and manipulate international public opinion.

Key points from the final declaration included:

Condemn U.S. and NATO imperialism: Denounce the aggressive and interventionist policies of the U.S. and NATO that threaten world peace through expanding their network of military bases and increasing military spending.

Support Cuba: Support Cuba's fight against the unjust U.S. blockade, remove Cuba from the illegal U.S. list of terrorism sponsors and express solidarity with Cuba's pursuit of a just and sustainable socialist society.

Call for base closures: Demand closure of all foreign military bases worldwide, particularly the illegally occupied Guantánamo territory, and oppose NATO expansion and increased military spending.

Support sovereignty and self-determination: Support nations' rights to self-determination and independence, particularly calling on Colombia, Brazil, and Argentina to abandon NATO partnerships. Stand in solidarity with countries and peoples facing occupation and colonial domination, including Guyana and Puerto Rico in the Caribbean; Argentina's Neuquén province and the Malvinas, South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands in South America; Palestine, Syria, and Cyprus in the Middle East; Western Sahara in Africa.

Solidarity with Haitian people: Stand in solidarity with the Haitian people's right to determine their own path towards a peaceful, sustainable, and prosperous future. Reject any foreign military intervention and call for solutions that respect Haiti's sovereignty and independence.

Advocate nuclear disarmament: Warn against nuclear conflict and campaign for a world free of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, opposing the militarization of space and cyber warfare.

Promote peace zones: Amplify the Proclamation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace and advocate against the presence of the U.S. Southern Command in the region. Condemn U.S. interference and militarization in the region (e.g., Peru, Guyana Essequibo, Venezuela) and support regional peace processes (e.g., Colombia).

Defend Indigenous and African communities: Demand reparations for the damages of colonialism and slavery while expressing solidarity with Indigenous and African communities of Latin America.

Oppose imperialist actions: Oppose imperialist actions globally, including in Nicaragua, Haiti (supporting its right to self-determination and development), and Ukraine (calling for an end to the conflict and denouncing U.S./NATO involvement).

Establish World Day of Action: Observe February 23 as "**World Day of Action against Foreign Military Bases**" for actions and initiatives to be carried out in all countries against these installations.

A symbol of hope and resistance

The seminar took place against a backdrop of escalating global tensions fueled by the increasing aggressiveness of imperialism and the interventions of the United States, the European Union, and NATO. These powerful entities continue to impose their agendas through propaganda campaigns and military conflicts, threatening peace and sovereignty worldwide.

The event concluded with a powerful demonstration of solidarity from the people of Caimanera, a town located near the U.S. Naval Base at Guantánamo Bay, a stark symbol of this imperialism. Their joyful resistance in the face of such a powerful symbol of oppression underscored the importance of the seminar's mission and the ongoing fight for a world free from war and oppression.

Photo: RESUMEN

Women's International Federation:
End the U.S. blockade against Cuba! #NoMasBloqueo

Pronouncement *Nov. 11, 2021*

Havana – The Regional Office of the Federación Democrática Internacional de Mujeres / Women's International Democratic Federation (FDIM) for the Americas and the Caribbean, together with the 68 national women's organizations affiliated and associated with FDIM in this area, whose work it coordinates on behalf of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), expresses its unconditional support for the firm proposals made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Cuba, Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla, before the diplomatic corps accredited to Cuba on 10 November, by exposing the new undisguised and abominable warp of the government of the United States and other influential figures in that nation … with its despicable 29 declarations, applicable around November 15, aimed at trying to show Cuba as a failed state, and to do so, to try to subvert the constitutional order, alter the citizen's tranquility, and damage peace in Cuba, with actions that provoke instability and violence, which include pressures and threats to governments of other countries and diplomats accredited in Cuba to carry out actions requested by the United States to achieve their goals.

All this, while the committed, capable and reliable authorities of Cuba, together with their people of women, men and brave young people, laborious, and courageous, among which the scientific community stands out, have engaged and achieved worthily, the almost absolute control of the devastating COVID-19 pandemic, and its effects in all spheres of life of the country, through the mass vaccination of 75% of the adult population with drugs manufactured in Cuba, proven by the relevant authorities, and have

won for the country the first place to begin vaccinating its children aged 2 to 18, with the express consent of the beneficiaries.

At the same time, the country has provided the assistance of its doctors and other health workers to more than 40 nations in the world to save human lives, with proven success, in addition to having already shared significant quantities of these vaccines with several countries.

However, in the face of so much evidence of the protection of life as the main human right of individuals, among other fundamental rights reliably protected by Cuban society throughout its more than 60 years of existence, the United States government, frustrated champion of respect for human rights in the world, and its hypocritical allies in the region, only manage to seek the intensification of the economic, commercial and financial blockade against our country, with increasing unilateral coercive measures, at all costs…

That is why the FDIM Regional Office for the Americas and the Caribbean calls on women's organizations in the Americas and the Caribbean, and throughout the world, as well as international public opinion, to speak out against this new, brutal and infamous outrage against Cuba with strong solidarity actions that demonstrate recognition of Cuba's efforts and resistance to the frequent and unsuccessful onslaught of the imperialist power against this enterprising country. We also urge them to remain alert to the actions of the counter-revolution in the countries, which are being unscrupulously demanded by the current U.S. government and its acolytes, and financed with U.S. taxpayers' money.

Have no doubt, just as the "Historical Leader of the Cuban Revolution, Commander in Chief Fidel Castro Ruz, passed into immortality convinced that the Cuban people will win," the current Maximum Leadership, Continuity of the Revolution, and the entire people, its women, men and youth will remain faithful to that Legacy, and to the Values instilled by Che: **"Hasta la Victoria Siempre"**

#CubaVive

We will resist and we will conquer!

Regional Office of the Federación Democrática Internacional de Mujeres / Women's Int'l Democratic Federation (FDIM) for the Americas and the Caribbean

Women In Struggle – Mujeres En Lucha (U.S.) is a member organization of the FDIM.

Federación Democrática Internacional de Mujeres: ¡Alto al bloqueo contra Cuba! #NoMasBloqueo

Pronunciamiento *11 noviembre, 2021*

La Habana – La Oficina Regional de la Federación Democrática Internacional de Mujeres (FDIM) para América y el Caribe, junto, a las 68 organizaciones nacionales de mujeres afiliadas y asociadas de la FDIM en esta Área, cuyo trabajo coordina en representación de la Federación de Mujeres Cubanas (FMC), expresa su incondicional respaldo a los firmes planteamientos del Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores de Cuba, Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla, ante el cuerpo diplomático acreditado en Cuba el pasado 10 de noviembre, al poner al descubierto la nueva, desembozada y abominable urdimbre injerencista del gobierno de los Estados Unidos y otras figuras influyentes en esa nación … con sus despreciables 29 declaraciones, aplicables hacia el 15 de noviembre próximo, encaminadas a tratar de mostrar a Cuba como un estado fallido, y para ello, tratar de subvertir el orden constitucional, alterar la tranquilidad ciudadana, y dañar la paz en Cuba, con acciones que provoquen inestabilidad y violencia, las cuales incluyen presiones y amenazas a gobiernos de otros países y a diplomáticos acreditados en Cuba para que realicen acciones solicitadas por Estado Unidos para lograr sus fines.

Todo ello, mientras las comprometidas, capaces y confiables autoridades de Cuba, junto a su pueblo de mujeres, hombres y jóvenes aguerridos, laboriosos, y valientes, entre los que destaca la comunidad científica, se han enfrascado y logrado dignamente, el control casi absoluto de la devastadora pandemia de la COVID-19, y sus efectos en todas las esferas de la vida del país, mediante la vacunación masiva del 75% de la población adulta con fármacos fabricados en Cuba, de eficacia probada por las autoridades correspondientes, y han conquistado para el país el primer lugar en comenzar a vacunar a sus niños de entre 2 y 18 años, con el consentimiento expreso de los beneficiarios.

Al mismo tiempo, el país ha hecho efectiva la asistencia de sus médicos y demás trabajadores de la salud a más de 40 naciones del mundo para salvar vidas humanas, con probados resultados satisfactorios, además de haber compartido ya con varios países cantidades apreciables de las referidas vacunas.

Sin embargo, ante tantas evidencias de protección de la vida como principal derecho humano de las personas, entre otros derechos fundamentales fehacientemente protegidos por la sociedad cubana a lo largo de sus más de 60 años de existencia, el gobierno de Estados Unidos, frustrado paladín del respeto a los derechos humanos en el mundo, y sus hipócritas aliados en la región, solo atinan a procurar el recrudecimiento del bloqueo económico, comercial y financiero contra nuestro país, con crecientes medidas coercitivas unilaterales, a toda costa…

Es por todo ello que la Oficina Regional de la FDIM para América y el Caribe llama a las organizaciones de mujeres en América y el Caribe, y en todo en mundo, así como a la opinión pública internacional, a pronunciarse contra este nuevo, brutal e infame atropello contra Cuba con enérgicas acciones de solidaridad que demuestren el reconocimiento de los esfuerzos y la resistencia de Cuba ante las frecuentes y fracasadas embestidas de la potencia imperialista hacia este emprendedor país. Asimismo, les instamos a mantenerse alertas ante las acciones de la contrarrevolución en los países, que están siendo inescrupulosamente demandadas por el actual el gobierno de Estados Unidos y sus acólitos, y financiadas con el dinero de los contribuyentes norteamericanos.

No tengan dudas, tal y como el "Líder Histórico de la Revolución Cubana, Comandante en Jefe Fidel Castro Ruz, pasó la inmortalidad convencido de que "el pueblo cubano vencerá", la Máxima Dirección actual, Continuidad de la Revolución, y el pueblo todo, sus mujeres, hombres y jóvenes nos mantendremos fieles a ese Legado, y a los Valores inculcados por el Che **"Hasta la Victoria Siempre".**

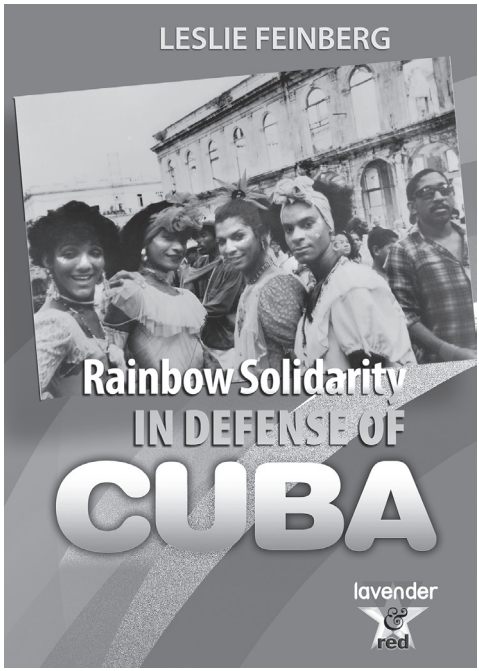
#CubaVive Resistiremos y Venceremos

Oficina de Regional FDIM (Federación Democrática Internacional de Mujeres) Para América y el Caribe

Women In Struggle-Mujeres En Lucha (EE.UU.) es una organización miembro de la FDIM.

LESLIE FEINBERG

Rainbow Solidarity in Defense of CUBA



lavender & red

This book is an edited compilation of chapters from the Lavender & Red series

G. Dunkel

The Lavender & Red
series is dedicated to

Pat Chin

who lives in the hearts
of her comrades

'Emancipate yourselves
from mental slavery:
None but ourselves
can free our minds'
– Bob Marley

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Introduction

'Rainbow Solidarity in Defense of Cuba' is a compilation of 25 articles about same-sex love and sex/gender variance in Cuba's pre- and post-revolutionary history. These articles make up parts 86 to 110 of the Lavender & Red series, which has run as a feature in *Workers World* newspaper since the first article appeared in the June 3, 2004, issue.

Lavender & Red gathers information about the relationship between the struggle for liberation from oppression based on sexuality, gender expression and sex, and the revolutionary movement for socialism, and ultimately for its highest and most humane stage, communism.

Lavender & Red confronts the political view, whether voiced because of demagoguery, demoralization or lack of information, that life under capitalism may be a hard road for lesbian, gay and bisexual, transgender and transsexual people – but socialism is inherently worse. The series offers information about little-known remarkable achievements in the Soviet Union and East Germany and carefully analyzes problems in these workers' states, as well – both of which bolster modern revolutionary theory and practice.

This ongoing historical materialist series answers those who maintain that Marxism as a science either is, or should be, concerned only with the direct struggle between finance capital and the working class. The series argues that class unity can only be cemented by revolutionary solidarity in the struggle against many forms of oppression.

Marx and his comrade Frederick Engels wrote and organized to build support for liberation struggles of oppressed peoples against slavery and colonialism. And Engels wrote an early examination of the roots of women's oppression in the rise of which led to the overturning of communal, pre-class societies and the reorganizing of social, gendered and sexual relations to fit a new world order ruled by the patriarchy.

Lavender & Red indicts class society – slavery, colonialism, capitalism and imperialism – for the ideology of divide and conquer, including racism and anti-homosexual prejudice.

'Gendering' domination

In 1898, North American capitalism burst its boundaries and outfought its colonialist predecessors to claim Cuba, the Philippines and Puerto Rico as U.S. possessions. Imperialist spin doctors developed racist campaigns as ideological cover for invasion, or more covert forms of "regime change." These white supremacist campaigns that spewed claims of racial and moral superiority – stimulants for the reactionary nationalism of an oppressor nation – aimed at dehumanizing peoples who were in the gunsights of U.S. finance capital.

Speaking as the rising voice of imperialist military aggression at the turn of the 20th century, Theodore Roosevelt – who extolled male "virility" – added: "The greatest danger that a long period of profound peace offers to a nation is that of effeminate tendencies in young men." Aggression by the rich, and later the super-rich, whether economic or meted out on their behalf by the armed bodies of the state, has always been "gendered" as masculine, superior and invincible.

An infamous article in the Philadelphia *Manufacturer* on March 6, 1889, was headlined "Do We Want Cuba?" Like Nazi eugenicists, the article – written by several powerful Republican politicians – bandied about the pros and cons of annexing Cuba, referring to Cubans as an "effeminate" people, lacking "virile" strength. (Bejel)

With the imperialist takeover of Cuba came a brutal re-structuring of the division of labor based on the sexes, kinship, family, marriage, sexuality, living accommodations and other aspects of social organization. The drive behind the changes was the insatiable appetite for profits of the banks and corporations. U.S. big business, including crime syndicates, organized urban Cuba into a giant brothel, super-exploiting the sexual labor of Cuban females and males, feminine and masculine, homosexual and heterosexual.

Then came the 1959 revolution. New ways had to be found to criticize and disparage the Cuban people. It became fashionable in imperialist culture to accuse Cuban males of "machismo" of being too "too masculine" When Cubans use the term, they are referring to the legacy of male chauvinism and sex/gender and sexual prejudices inherited from centuries of patriarchal rule by colonialism and imperialism. But in the imperialist oppressor country, the term is chauvinist, blaming Cuban male gender expression for all the ills of patriarchy.

The charge of "hyper masculinity" against men of African descent has been a cornerstone of Jim Crow lynch law within the U.S., as well.

'New man,' 'new woman'

People "make their own history," Karl Marx wrote, "but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past."

Since the victory over the U.S.-backed Batista dictatorship in 1959, Cuba has mobilized the people to reorganize the economy to meet the needs of the whole laboring population. As the Cubans say, "It's not easy." It's especially hard when U.S. imperialism is waging covert war and threatening overt war against Cuba, trying to sabotage revolutionary construction at every turn.

Yet this small island nation of 11 million has, for half a century, done what the richest imperialist country on the planet won't do and can't do: provide everyone jobs, food and clothing, a home, free education – from kindergarten to graduate school – and free quality health care, including preventive medicine. The Cuban Revolution has made enormous strides in eliminating racism, which itself required dismantling the apartheid economic and social structures.

The Cuban Revolution elevated mass popular discussion about how to raise a "new man" and a "new woman" in a society still trying to shed the burdens of almost half a millennium of patriarchal class rule and church dogma. The revolution ushered in sex education and reproductive rights. Revolutionary Cuba is also making qualitative leaps in understanding gender expression.

U.S. airport bookstores are lined with pop psychology publications that claim women and men are from different planets. Cuba's mass discussion about the "new man" and the "new woman," which examines new ways to interact, is lightyears ahead ideologically. The whole premise of the island-wide education, discussion and debates is that prejudicial and harmful attitudes and actions resulted from old, oppressive economic and social organization – and not vice-versa.

The mass discussion starts from the understanding that with changed economic and social organization, human beings can change their attitudes, rather than being biologically wired to be oppressive, violent, avaricious or cruel.

Break the U.S. blockade

Of course, there were and are problems in Cuba. That's what half a millennium of colonialism and imperialism leaves – problems. But the problems that exist in Cuba – or any other workers' state – do not invalidate the revolution. Quite the contrary. The process of solving those problems is the forward motion of the revolution.

A lot of facts are assembled between the covers of this book. The facts articulate Cuba's achievements – quantitative gains, as well as qualitative advancements – of which there are many.

These compiled articles are not dispassionate journalism. Political analysts, like historians, always write from a class point of view. But these articles are factually based and are placed where they belong – within the context of a life-and-death struggle to defend Cuba.

You will find no condemnation of the Cuban Revolution in this book. The history of the Cuban Revolution is a process from which we who have not yet made our revolutions have a great deal to learn about the struggle for sexual liberation, based on concrete historical conditions.

Viewed together, the facts in these 25 articles demonstrate Cuba's inexorable progress on social issues, despite the U.S.-enforced economic blockade and unrelenting imperialist covert and overt warfare that drains the country's labor, time, planning, organization and resources for defense.

We hope that, because this material is here amassed in one place for the first time, the reader will be able to get a panoramic view of the forward motion of the Cuban Revolution in the struggle to eradicate the legacy of pre-Revolutionary prejudices against homosexuality, diversity of gender expression, sex variance and sex change.

– Leslie Feinberg
June 14, 2009

In June 2007, as this book was first being readied for production, Cuban revolutionary leader Vilma Espín died. Espín helped lead the Cuban women's "revolution within the revolution" that has blazed new trails for liberation of sexuality, gender expression and the sexes. She leaves the value of her lifetime of laboring for change to the Cuban people, the Cuban Revolution and the communist movement worldwide.

1970s Cold War gay-bashers condemn Cuba

Bob McCubbin, a young gay male leader in Workers World Party during the rise of the early gay liberation movement, recalls, "By having regular articles in *Workers World*, attending gay protests, producing and distributing flyers addressing lesbian and gay issues, giving extra visibility to gay comrades, organizing branch meetings on related issues, and doing outreach to the lesbian and gay communities, we were successful in attracting many lesbian and gay youth to our ranks in the early and middle 1970s.

"But this work was not without difficulties," McCubbin says. He remembers, in particular, how a stream of articles in the big-business media opened up a campaign against Cuba. Many of the articles focused on the imperialist charge that gay and lesbian Cubans were being mistreated on the island after the 1959 revolution.

The reality is that the Cuban Revolution – which seized state power on an island in which class society, colonialism and imperialism had woven prejudices and repression against same-sex love tightly into the fabric of life – has made tremendous advances for men who love men and women who love women, as well as the struggle against racism and sexism.

The U.S.-led blockade is designed not only to economically strangle the Cuban population, but to obscure from lesbians, gays, bisexuals and trans people living in the imperialist citadel an understanding about what a revolution can achieve in terms of social progress.

It is impossible to skip over the staggering hypocrisy of U.S. imperialism and its media propaganda machinery. They don't care a whit about lesbian and gay, bisexual and trans lives. They want to crush the revolution and re-enslave the entire population.

Their political duplicity was obvious on the domestic front. In the 1950s, these Cold War capitalists had escalated a state witch hunt against every expression of homosexuality and gender variance under the guise of a "Lavender Scare."

Same-sex love was still illegal across the United States. Gay men, lesbians and all gender-variant people faced police raids and entrapment, prison, torture, forced institutionalization, rape and lynchings, loss of jobs, homes and loved ones.

But by the 1970s – while cops were still raiding bars after Stonewall and same-sex love was still illegal – the imperialists suddenly became champions of gay rights, anywhere except on their own soil.

The big-business spin made it seem as though the Cuban Revolution was a wellspring of anti-gay prejudice.

"Absent the persistent and pervasive climate of anti-communism," McCubbin stresses, "such attacks would have been laughable, emanating as they did from a country where gay-baiting was an indispensable political tool and where scarcely a week went by without the murder, somewhere within the U.S., of a transgender person.

"But since the anti-Cuba propaganda campaign was relentless and did have a negative effect on many people, including many lesbian and gay youth, we felt a serious responsibility to answer and challenge these articles, and we did, just as we conscientiously defended the other socialist countries, and in particular the Soviet Union, from the steady stream of anti-communist attacks.

"So we were often challenged by progressive youth, gay and straight: 'You support Cuba?' The more serious listened carefully to what we had to say in Cuba's defense, but we were also badmouthed frequently by anti-communist elements in the gay movement."

Understanding the Cuban Revolution, and the hand it was dealt by imperialism, is as important today as it was then, because it demonstrates what a revolution can achieve, even when surrounded and under siege by imperialism.

The truth to begin with is this: Communists did not bring anti-homosexual prejudice to the Americas. The development of class societies and colonialism did.

Anti-gay, anti-trans Inquisition in the Americas

Colonialism: the real 'Apocalypto'

From Indigenous oral histories, passed down through millennia, to the hostile accounts kept by colonial record keepers, a great deal of evidence exists to show that sex/gender variance and homosexuality were part of the fabric of early cooperative societies in the Americas – from pole to pole.

What is significant about the abundant European colonial records – whether military, missionary or anthropological – is not their perceptivity, objectivity or accuracy in describing life among the diverse Native societies in this hemisphere. It's that these observations by the Europeans and their reactions to homosexuality and gender/sex variance in Native cultures – reflected in characterizations like "devilish," "sinful," "perverted," "abominable," "unnatural," "heinous," "disgusting," "lewd" – reveal how different the European societies were.

The "observed" were peoples who lived in societies that were either communal or were in the early stages of class division.

The "observers" came as military, commercial or intellectual servants of entrenched European ruling classes that were expanding beyond their own hemisphere to steal gold, land and other resources.

In Europe, where most communal lands had been seized by slave-owners and then feudal landlords, state laws and repression against same-sex love and sex/gender variance had been part of this centuries-old class warfare.

From south to north

Colonial observations about same-sex love and sex/gender variance in Indigenous societies in the Western hemisphere are copious. Those with imperial aspirations studied the peoples they sought to militarily conquer and enslave.

When a European colonial expedition in 1576 reached the lands of the Tupinamba people in what is now northeastern Brazil, they found female-bodied hunters and warriors who were accepted by the other Native men. Recalling the Greek Amazon warriors, the Europeans dubbed the river that flowed through that area the "River of the Amazons." (Magalhães)

Narrating his first trip down another river, now called the Mississippi, Jesuit Jacques Marquette described in the 17th century how, among the Illinois and Nadouessi, he found people who today would be referred to as Two-Spirit. Marquette wrote that they were "summoned to the Councils, and nothing can be decided without their advice. Finally, through their profession of Leading an Extraordinary life, they pass for Manitous – That is to say, for Spirits – or persons of Consequence." (Marquette)

French missionary Joseph François Lafitau condemned the Two-Spirit people he found in societies along the western Great Lakes, Louisiana and Florida, but these Native peoples did not share his prejudice. He wrote in 1724 that "they participate in all religious ceremonies, and this profession of an extraordinary life causes them to be regarded as people of a higher order." (Lafitau)

But where Indigenous ruling classes had emerged and consolidated their territory, sometimes after the violent overturn of neighboring communal societies, these attitudes had changed.

Historian Max Mejía wrote, "In the Aztec culture of pre-Hispanic Mexico, the dominant culture at the time the Spanish arrived, the treatment of sodomy was not exactly favorable. On the contrary, the Aztecs had very harsh laws against it, punishing the practice severely with public execution for those who were caught. Punishment affected mainly males, but women were not exempt." (Mejía)

Friar Bartolomé de las Casas noted that among the Aztecs, "The man who dressed as a woman, or the woman found dressed with men's clothes, died because of this."

"However," Mejía explained, "there were exceptions to the Aztecs' rules against homosexuality. Most historians agree that the practice was tolerated when it took place in religious rituals."

Mejía added, "[T]he Aztecs ruled over a vast array of peoples, who had different cultural histories. Several of these did not necessarily share the Aztecs' vision of homosexuality and its practice. Some even showed signs of singular tolerance towards it in their communities. One of these was the Zapotec culture, derived from the Mayans and located in what is now the state of Oaxaca."

He emphasized, "[W]hat I am trying to show is that in pre-Hispanic Mexico, alongside the rigid Aztecs, there existed – and there exist still today – other, more flexible cultures more tolerant of homosexuality."

When it came to sexuality, Mejía stated: "[T]he Mayans had a more favorable view of diversity within the community, which suggests greater tolerance of homosexuality, above all when it concerned religious rituals and artistic practices."

The real "Apocalypto"

In 2006, director Mel Gibson made a movie called "Apocalypto" about the Mayan empire, as experienced by a family from a nearby hunting-gathering society being chased by its warriors.

Gibson's movie ideologically serves those in the U.S. who yearn for a Fourth Reich, much as Leni Riefenstahl's films did for imperialist Nazi capital.

"Apocalypto," which depicts the Mayans as inherently bloodthirsty, is being screened in the citadel of the most bloodthirsty imperialist power in history. It arrives in chain theaters in the U.S. at a time when Lou Dobbs and other white-

Valboa Indos nefandum Sodomiæ ſcelus com- XXII.
mittentes, canibus obijcit dilaniandos.
VALBOA in iſta ad montes profectione Regulum in Eſquaragua ſuperat & cadit cum multis Indis: pagum deinde ingreſſus Reguli fratrem & alios quoſdam muliebri veſtitu ornatos: valde admiratus, cauſam ſciſcitatur: intelligit caſum Regulum & omnes eius aulicos nefando illo peccato naturæ aduerſo infectos. Attonitus Valboa adeo deteſtabile ſcelus ad iſtos Barbaros penetraſſe, corripi omnes iubet numero forte quadraginta, & canibus quos circumducebat, lacerandos obijcit.

Antonio de la Calancha, a Spanish official in Lima, wrote that during Vasco Núñez de Balboa's incursion across Panama, "he saw men dressed like women; Balboa learnt that they were sodomites and threw the king and forty others to be eaten by his dogs, a fine action of an honorable and Catholic Spaniard." (Guerra)

supremacist propagandists are pitching classic fascist appeals to the middle-class in this country to view Mexican immigrants as "the enemy within."

It also screens as U.S. finance capital has unleashed its war machine to recolonize Iraq and Afghanistan under the banner of a "war on terror."

"Apocalypto" is pro-imperialist propaganda, making colonialism synonymous with salvation. The film ends with the Spanish fleet appearing on the horizon to save the day.

But when the lights come up, it is colonialism and imperialism that are the real historical "Apocalyptos."

Colonialism brings Inquisition

The patriarchs of colonial power violently restructured the Indigenous societies they militarily conquered – in economic organization, kinship, family/community organization, sexualities, gender and sex roles – in order to best facilitate enslavement, exploitation and oppression.

Mejía stated that with the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors, "An absolutist discourse enveloped homosexuality in the concepts of 'infamous sin,' 'sin against nature,' corruption of the soul and alliance with the devil. They punished the practice without distinctions, among both lay people and clerics."

This religious ideology and the ethos of male supremacy, he said, corresponded to the war-driven European social order.

"Furthermore," Mejía concludes, "the conquerors treated 'sodomy' as a special Indian sin and hunted it down and punished it as such on a grand scale. They orchestrated crusades like the Holy Inquisition, which began burning sodomites at the stake as a special occasion, as in the memorable auto-da-fé of San Lázaro in Mexico City."

This bloody crusade of terror is confirmed in the colonizers' own words.

Antonio de la Calancha, a Spanish official in Lima, wrote that during Vasco Núñez de Balboa's incursion across Panama, he "saw men dressed like women; Balboa learnt that they were sodomites and threw the king and forty others to be eaten by his dogs, a fine action of an honorable and Catholic Spaniard." (Guerra)

When the Spanish invaded the Antilles and Louisiana, "[T]hey found men dressed as women who were respected by their societies. Thinking they were hermaphrodites, or homosexuals, they slew them." (Green)

Native peoples throughout this hemisphere fought back.

Conquistador Nuño de Guzmán noted in 1530 that after one battle the last Indigenous person taken prisoner, who had "fought most courageously, was a man in the habit of a woman." (Burton)

C. Robles was a one of a number of female-bodied Mexican revolutionaries who enlisted as males and fought for national independence from Spain. Robles and at least four others rose to the rank of colonel. (suppressedhistories.net)

Colonial period in Cuba
Bodies shackled & repressed

Colonialism, and later imperialism, brought anti-homosexual and anti-trans laws and state repression to Cuba. The deep bite of the knotted lash of oppressor ideology backed them up.

For more than 300 years, Spanish colonialism shackled the laboring population of Cuba, literally claiming ownership of the lives, labor and bodies of millions.

The enslaved toilers were from the decimated Indigenous peoples of the island and African peoples – survivors of mass kidnappings from their homelands and of the Middle Passage holocaust.

Using Bibles as well as bullets, colonizers who bled the labor of the enslaved class literally "laid down the law" – reshaping and regulating every aspect of life for the enslaved class, including economic structure, kinship recognition, marriage, organization of the sexes, sexuality and gender expression.

Colonial terror, under the banner of religious law, enforced the brutal remodeling of economic and social life among peoples from diverse societies that the colonialists, and later imperialists, sought to conquer and exploit.

The following historical anecdote underscores the importance the colonial occupiers placed on eradicating the "pecado nefando" – the "nefarious sin" of same-sex love and/or gender/sex variance.

In order to petition Havana's town council in 1597 for his freedom, an enslaved man argued that he had "rendered a valuable service by discovering and denouncing those who had committed the 'pecado nefando.'" (de la Fuente)

There were many forms of resistance to colonial cultural imperialism. Santería, for example, used the trappings of Roman Catholicism to shelter African religious beliefs and rituals – which make room for very different sex/gender expression.

Havana: cross-dressing labor leader arrested

In the mid-1600s, the Spanish Captain General who ruled over the rural and urban enslaved population sentenced 20 "effeminate sodomites" to be burned to death.

Others were exiled to Cayo Cruz, a small island in Havana Bay, which was thereafter referred to in Spanish by an anti-homosexual slur.

Historian Amara Das Wilhelm added, "Similar disparaging attitudes toward homosexuals were expressed in a 1791 Havana newspaper article entitled 'A Critical Letter About the Man-Woman,' which condemned the effeminate sodomites that apparently thrived in eighteenth-century Havana." (The Gay and Lesbian Vaishnava Association online)

Revolutionary Puerto Rican trade unionist Luisa Capetillo on the day of her arrest in Havana on cross-dressing charges.

U.S. imperialism militarily occupied Cuba for four years, beginning in 1898. From 1902 until the 1959 Cuban Revolution, Wall Street ruled by establishing dictatorships to squeeze the island's economy in its fist, restructuring Cuba for exploitation as a giant sugar plantation.

Laws against same-sex love and gender variance and brutal state enforcement continued to be used as a cudgel for economic, social and political control.

Cross-dressing Puerto Rican labor organizer Luisa Capetillo was arrested in Havana in July 1915 for wearing men's clothing. Capetillo was a single mother, a revolutionary, and a much-loved and respected labor organizer.

After supporting the 1905 farm workers' strike in the northern region of Puerto Rico, she became a reader in a tobacco plant, an industry whose workers were among the most politically conscious. She also spoke in public about the needs of working women, including the right to sex education. She strongly believed that sexuality was not the business of the church or the state.

As a full-time labor organizer after 1912, Capetillo traveled extensively, particularly to Havana, Tampa and New York because they were hubs of the tobacco workers' movement.

In Cuba, Capetillo actively supported a sugar cane workers' strike organized by the Anarchist Federation of Cuba.

The Cuban government tried unsuccessfully to deport her as an agitator.

Then it focused on her wearing of a "man's" suit, tie and fedora in public to charge her with "causing a scandal."

Capetillo fought the charge, arguing in court that no law prevented her from wearing men's garb, that such clothing was appropriate for the changing role of women in society, and that she had worn similar clothing in the streets of Puerto Rico and Mexico without state intervention.

Capetillo won her court battle – the judge ordered the charges dropped. News of her victory spread in articles in all the major newspapers in Cuba and Puerto Rico.

Historian Aurora Levins Morales concluded, "The incident received massive press coverage, and Capetillo used it as an opportunity to attack conventional morality, with its rigid sex roles, and women's imprisonment within it." (Morales)

In 1938, under U.S. domination, the Cuban Penal Code – the "Public Ostentation Law" – was enacted. This law mandated state penalties for "habitual homosexual acts," public displays of same-sex affection and/or gender-variant dress and self-expression.

1950s Havana: Imperialist sexploitation

For 450 years of Cuba's history, the social organization and state regulation of the sexes, gender expression and sexualities was – as among all occupied and colonized peoples – in thrall to the brutal systems of exploitation of agricultural landlords, capitalist bosses and imperialist finance capitalists.

By the mid-20th century, the impoverishment sweeping the island was the outgrowth of imperialism's conversion of the economy into sugar and citrus plantations and nickel mines that shackled the rural laboring population to the earth.

Havana exerted a gravitational pull on those who cut cane from sunup to sundown. By the 1950s, the promise of jobs attracted hundreds of thousands of impoverished rural workers of all sexualities, genders and sexes to the urban capital, the largest city on the island.

Many tens of thousands whose sexuality or gender expression had made them publicly vulnerable and without privacy in rural towns and villages found employment in Havana. Capitalist organized crime bosses ran an interlocking directorate of large-scale prostitution, tourism, gambling and drug distribution in the capital city.

In the 1950s, McCarthyite repression in the U.S. – including the puritanical purges and state repression carried out under the banner of fighting a "Lavender Menace" – spurred the expansion of this lucrative offshore capitalist sex-drugs-gambling industry in Havana for the rich and powerful to escape the U.S. Cold War climate.

"Not surprisingly, then," researchers Lourdes Arguelles and B. Ruby Rich stressed, "Cuban homosexuals had preferential hiring treatment in the Havana tourist sector in order to meet the demands" of U.S. businessmen and military brass.

Arguelles and Rich published their extensively researched report, entitled "Homosexuality, Homophobia, and Revolution: Notes Toward an Understanding of the Cuban Lesbian and Gay Male Experience," in the summer of 1984.

The two researchers added that the illegal prostitution industry was also created for the patriarchs and scions of the Cuban elite, who sought feminine male-bodied youth and adults.

In the towns and villages, sexuality, gender and the organization of the sexes were in the servitude of patriarchal agricultural servitude; in the urban capital, they were employed to meet the needs of patriarchal capitalist wage slavery.

Arguelles and Rich explained: "Even in the Havana of the 1950s, everyday life was not easy for the working-class or petty-bourgeois homosexual. Unemployment was high and had been steadily increasing throughout the decade. The scarcity of productive occupations demanded a strictly closeted occupational life. For all women, and especially for lesbians, employment almost invariably entailed continual sexual harassment."

Men who had sex with men and women who had sex with women were caught up in the dragnet of the illegal economy.

Arguelles and Rich noted: "Apart from employment realities, social pressures made thousands of pre-revolutionary homosexuals part of this underworld. Even homosexuals such as students (who were differently placed) were integrated into this subculture through the bars that they frequented: the St. Michel, the Dirty Dick, El Gato Tuerto." Most of these bars were owned by crime syndicates.

The researchers emphasized, "The commodification of homosexual desire in the Havana underworld and in the bourgeois homosexual underground during the pre-revolutionary era, however, did not produce a significant toleration of homosexual life-styles in the larger social arena.

"If legal sanctions and official harassment were rare," Arguelles and Rich explained, "this tolerance was due less to social acceptance than to overriding considerations of profit and the economic interests of the underworld that dominated the Cuban political apparatus.

"The consumer structure of the Havana underworld never spawned a 'gay culture' or 'gay sensibility' even in strictly commercial terms, due to its isolation from the mainstream of social life and the degree of guilt and self-hatred afflicting its members."

Arguelles and Rich concluded that Santería – African-Cuban religious beliefs and practices that challenge the colonialist and imperialist sex/gender and sexuality systems – has been a "favored form of gender transcendence for many Cuban homosexual men and lesbians."

Unweaving the lies

Why many Cuban gay men and lesbians left after 1959

Significant numbers of Cuban homosexual males and females, including many who were gender variant, began leaving the island immediately after the revolutionary 26th of July Movement overthrew the hated U.S.-backed Batista regime in 1959. The U.S. big-business media pointed their microphones at counterrevolutionary claims that anti-gay terror drove them to flee.

This reactionary political propaganda was a cover for a dirty war by imperialism to carry out "regime change" in Cuba. It also was aimed at demoralizing the multinational, revolutionary wing of the young gay liberation movement in the U.S.

This political and ideological campaign to paint Cuba as a cruel and oppressive dictatorship was crafted by Cold War capitalists who were themselves carrying out a ruthless domestic war against same-sex love and gender variance.

Before the Cuban Revolution, U.S. finance capital had installed two iron-fisted dictatorships in order to grease the gears of exploitation: Gerardo Machado in the late 1920s and Fulgencio Batista in the 1950s. For a cut of the profits, these brutal regimes served the rule of U.S. sugar, nickel and citrus companies and made it possible for the imperialists to own the banks, telephone and electric systems and big retail stores.

U.S. crime bosses ran the lucrative large-scale sex industry and interconnected casinos and drug distribution. Tens of thousands of Cuban women, men and children of all sexualities served the desires of wealthy and powerful tourists from the U.S.

Cold War anti-gay and anti-trans purges and persecution in the U.S. created the demand for an offshore prostitution network in Havana that exploited large numbers of men and boys, many of them feminine, for profit, as well as women.

The revolution that took state power on Jan. 1, 1959, shut down the sex industry and casinos. The workers – rural and urban – of Cuba faced a massive task: restructuring their economy to meet the needs of all, which meant creating jobs, introducing land reform, and providing food, clothing, housing, medical care, basic literacy and higher education.

This work had to be done while imperialism tried to take away every tool for change through economic strangulation, military encirclement and siege.

Seeking scientific understanding

Researchers Lourdes Arguelles and B. Ruby Rich made an important analytical contribution in the mid-1980s to understanding why many Cuban homosexuals left after the revolution – and why many stayed.

The two researchers took a scientific approach, accruing data through historical analysis, survey, field and experiential methods. They interpreted the results "within a theoretical framework drawn from lesbian-feminist and critical gay scholarship and the politico-economic and phenomenological study of Cuban social life."

Between 1979 and 1984 Arguelles and Rich interviewed Cubans on the island and émigrés in the United States, Spain, Mexico and Puerto Rico. The report on the research, titled "Homosexuality, Homophobia, and Revolution: Notes Toward an Understanding of the Cuban Lesbian and Gay Male Experience," was first published in the summer of 1984 in "Signs, A Journal of Women in Culture and Society."

The two researchers said their goals were to reveal the nature and dynamics of the Cuban homosexual experience in order to put the questions of same-sex love in Cuba, migration and resettlement in context.

They also sought to develop greater understanding of same-sex love in what were at that time referred to as Third World countries and communities, and to further develop theory "on the nature of the relationships between the structures of sexuality and the corresponding structures of socialist organization."

This is what they found.

Attempt to discredit the revolution

The role of economic incentive and individual ambition – powerful stimulants for all migration from poorer to wealthier countries – was seldom considered when it came to Cuban homosexual émigrés.

Arguelles and Rich wrote, "The more structuralist explanations for international population movements, which stress the role of capital and of capitalist states in organizing migratory flows from less developed to more developed economies, have yet to be invoked in the interpretation of gay migration from Cuba."

Washington had passed the Immigration and Naturalization Act in 1952, which specifically mandated blocking entry of/or expelling "sexually deviant" immigrants. But when it came to Cuban homosexuals, Arguelles and Rich noted, "Then, as now, anticommunism won out."

Wealthy homosexual male Cubans, who before the revolution had spent extensive periods abroad, left the island for good. "Emigration began immediately. The promoters and overlords of the Havana underworld along with large numbers of their displaced workers (many of them homosexuals) headed for Miami. Many

lesbians who had liaisons with members of the bourgeoisie followed their male protectorate to Miami, as did gay men who had worked for U.S. firms or had done domestic work for the native bourgeoisie."

The two researchers point out that Cuban "refugee" testimony became "the main source for evaluation of Cuban gay life, despite knowledge of the pressures on émigrés to testify to political persecution in their country of origin in order to attain the legal and economic advantages of refugee status in their new country."

These narratives were then amplified as part of an imperialist propaganda campaign calculated to neutralize "badly needed support for the Cuban revolution among its natural allies," Arguelles and Rich wrote. In addition, the propaganda campaign "legitimated the presence in traditionally liberal circles of some of the more reactionary elements within the Cuban émigré population."

They added that this propaganda obscured changing realities of gay life in Cuba as part of the ongoing revolutionary process, made the historical inheritance of the pre-revolutionary political economy and homophobia seem irrelevant, and helped to disguise the oppression and exploitation of gay and lesbian Cubans living in émigré enclaves.

The campaign also distanced "gay activists in capitalist mainstream culture from minority gays involved in the liberation movements of their respective countries and national communities."

And lastly, this scapegoating of Cuba "has made the growing number of progressive gay émigrés who criticize but also support the revolution into living contradictions: invisible to gay liberation forces but easy targets for the homophobic anti-Castro army in exile."

While many left the island, many others stayed.

Arguelles and Rich concluded, "Other homosexuals, especially those from working-class backgrounds or students from petty-bourgeois families, worked to integrate themselves into the revolution."

They stressed, "For these homosexuals, class and class interests were perceived as more elemental aspects of their identity than homosexual behavior. And the revolution spoke to these interests and this identity."

There was work for all, free health care, free education, affordable housing and tremendous cultural growth.

Cuban lesbians, some of whom had played an important role in the pre-revolutionary urban struggle, also benefited from the great gains being made by and for women.

Early Cuban Revolution paved road to sexual liberation

The first revolutionary step toward the liberation of sexuality, gender expression and oppressed sexes in Cuba was the dismantling of the sex-for-profit industry and interconnected gambling dens and drug-distribution networks. This concrete, material first act by the Cuban Revolution unshackled human bodies, desire and gender expression from capitalist commodification, commercialization and exploitation.

For almost half a millennium the island had been manacled by colonialism, capitalism and imperialism. The holds of their ships brought enslaved peoples from Africa. Their advanced weaponry was cocked and trained on the enslaved laborers. The ideological lash of the Roman Catholic Church sliced to the bone. White supremacist, racist ideology, patriarchal oppression of women and state-enforced repression against same-sex love ruled the economic and social order.

Just as colonialism and imperialism left the island's fertile soil cultivated as a single-crop plantation, class enslavement tilled the fields of culture.

When the revolutionary process began, it had to start from there.

Before the 1959 revolution, the burgeoning sector of the Cuban economy was Havana's prostitution industry, booming with Cold War consumption – the largest in the Caribbean – and the gambling, drugs and tourism connected to it. U.S. crime syndicate bosses and wealthy Cubans with connections to Batista's regime owned the profitable operations.

Arguelles and Rich noted that this illegal economy "employed more than two hundred thousand workers as petty traders, casino operators, entertainers, servants and prostitutes." (Arguelles)

Many were homosexual – male and female – and many of the males were feminine. Crime bosses also exploited tens of thousands of heterosexual women and men in the prostitution industry. All performed to the sexual whims of the fathers and sons of the U.S. and Cuban ruling classes.

Cuban citizen, translator and interpreter Leonardo Hechavarría, and Cuban defender, typographer and gay rights activist Marcel Hatch, summed up that era: "Before the 1959 Revolution, life for lesbians and gays was one of extreme isolation and repression, enforced by civil law, augmented by Catholic dogma. Patriarchal attitudes made lesbians invisible. If discovered, they'd often suffer sexual abuse, disgrace in the community, and job loss.

"Havana's gay male underground – some 200,000 – was a purgatory of prostitution to American tourists, domestic servitude, and constant threats of violence and blackmail." (Hatch)

Arguelles and Rich explained: "It was just a profitable commodification of sexual fantasy. For the vast majority, homosexuality made life a shameful and guilt-ridden experience. Such was gay Havana in the fabled 'avant la guerre' period."

Reactionaries prey on dislocation

For male homosexuals in Havana, particularly those who were feminine and/or cross-dressing, social outlets for congregating were limited once this large-scale illegal economy was shut down after the revolution.

As a result, Arguelles and Rich explained, this "prolonged the relationship between the declining underworld and more progressive homosexuals, locking the two groups together for sheer companionship and sexual pleasure."

That was truer for Cuban males than females.

The two researchers also noted, "Homosexual perspectives on the revolution could shift according to class interests."

Middle-class homosexuals whose privileges were threatened by agrarian and urban reforms banded, they said, with "the remaining veterans of the underworld" to oppose the revolution.

"Some veterans of the old underworld enclave joined counter-revolutionary activities or were pushed into them by the CIA," Arguelles and Rich reported. "Not a few of the progressive homosexuals became implicated by default in counter-revolutionary activities and were even jailed.

"Young homosexuals seeking contact with 'the community' in the bars and famous cruising areas of La Rampa were thus introduced to counter-revolutionary ideology and practice. One example of such a dynamic is the case of Rolando Cubela, a homosexual student leader who fought in the revolutionary army but was later enlisted by the CIA to assassinate Fidel Castro."

The two researchers concluded, "Homosexual bars and La Rampa cruising areas were perceived, in some cases correctly, as centers of counter-revolutionary activities and began to be systematically treated as such."

Cuban women organize for gains

The overall situation for Cuban women who loved women had its own characteristics.

Under the triple weight of the patriarchies of colonialism, capitalism and imperialism, a dynamic women's movement emerged in Cuba as early as the 1920s and Cuban women won the right to vote and be elected to public office in 1934. (thegully.com)

After the 1959 seizure of state power, it was Cuban women as a whole who became the driving force to break the chokehold of centuries-old patriarchal economic and social organization, and the attitudes about women and femininity it engendered.

The Cuban Women's Federation (FMC) formed quickly after the revolution in 1960. It exerted immeasurably more power because it was a part of the revolution, not apart from it.

At a 1966 leadership meeting of the FMC, President Fidel Castro observed, "Women's participation in the revolution was a revolution in the revolution, and if we were asked what the most revolutionary thing that the revolution is doing, we would answer that it is precisely this – the revolution that is occurring among the women of our country." (Hillson)

Hechavarría and Hatch stressed, "Following the Revolution, women won near full equality under the law, including pay equity, the right to child care, abortion, and military service, among other historic gains, laying the basis for their higher social and political status.

"This foundation, a first in the Americas, played an important role in women's greater independence and sexual freedom, a prerequisite for homosexual liberation. The Revolution also destroyed the Mafia-controlled U.S. tourist driven prostitution trade that held many Cuban women and gay men in bondage."

Hechavarría and Hatch added, "The Revolution undertook to provide ample education and employment opportunities for female prostitutes.

"Advances for women in general were naturally extended to lesbians, and many became among the most ardent defenders of the Revolution."

Revolutionizing the sexes

Cuban men, as well as women, had been treated as the property of other men – the patriarchs of property.

Revolutionary Cuban men have carried out their own work to consciously build the consciousness of a "new man" on the basis of new social principles.

Ché Guevara, Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution as a whole challenged all Cuban men to examine male consciousness, attitudes and behaviors.

This revolutionary effort, which continues today, aimed to change old ways that men were taught to interact with women. Like the revolution itself, this work is most profoundly meaningful because it is a process, not a single act.

The revolution challenged the biology-is-destiny "natural order" ideologies of colonialism, capitalism and imperialism that elevated patriarchs to rule.

The revolution challenged the reactionary biological determinist concept that men are innately superior and women are naturally submissive.

But genuine economic and social equality for women, and profound change of the attitudes of men, could only be generated by economic and social reorganization that could lift the standard of living for all. Imperialism was determined to thwart and sabotage that work at every moment. U.S. finance capital cinched the island in an economic noose, and the Pentagon cordoned the island, attacking overtly and covertly.

As Washington and the Pentagon ratcheted up the pressure on Cuba, and the CIA spearheaded the commando invasion at Playa Girón, the entire island's population had to be organized and mobilized to meet two huge tasks – military defense of the revolution and harvest of the cane crop that sustained economic life.

Everyone – of all sexes, genders and sexualities, from children to elders – was called up for these life-and-death tasks.

Inside Cuba, trying to fit many thousands of urban homosexual and/or gender-variant males into agricultural work sharpened a social contradiction.

Outside Cuba, propagandistic exploitation of this contradiction led to one of the worst slanders against the Cuban Revolution in the history of the workers' state.

1965 UMAP brigades: What they were, what they were not

One of the most terrible slanders against the Cuban Revolution is that the workers' state was a "penal colony," interning gay men in "concentration camps" in 1965. That charge, which refers to the 1965 mobilization of Units to Aid Military Production (UMAP), still circulates today as good coin.

Therefore the formation and ending of the UMAP work brigades in the history of the Cuban workers' state is vitally important for today's activists to study very carefully and thoroughly. Those who are working hard to make a revolution in the heartland of imperialism will pay the most careful attention, and bring the most genuine solidarity and humility – teachability – to this important analysis.

For those worldwide who struggle against oppression based on sexuality, gender and sex, the sharpening of this sexual/gender/sex contradiction in Cuba in 1965 offers this critical lesson: The way sexuality and the sexes are socially organized, and gender is socially assigned and allowed to be expressed, always has a history.

Since the overturning of matrilineal, cooperative societies, strict organization based on race, sex, gender expression and sexuality has served the dictates of ruling-class economic organization, and has been under the knuckles of state regulation and repression.

Pre-revolutionary Cuba was no exception.

Spain exports Inquisition

Without understanding Cuba's historical process, it's impossible to understand its revolutionary process.

Researcher Ian Lumsden noted in his study on Cuba and homosexuality, "There is much speculation about the incidence of homosexual activity between Cuba's indigenous people, as there is with respect to other parts of the New World. Whatever its true extent, it was used as a pretext for Spain to enslave natives on the grounds that they were not fully human."

He explained that, "Condemnation of sodomy and subsequently of homosexuality, along with repressive mystification of women's sexuality, have long been at the core of Spanish Catholic dogmas regarding sexuality." Only crimes against the king and heresy were higher crimes than "sodomy" in the Middle Ages.

Lumsden added, "There was competition between the Inquisition and the secular courts about who should have authority to exorcise it from the body politic."

Sentences ranged from castration to being burned alive.

The domestic Spanish crusade against "sodomy," he explained, was driven by the ruling class "desire to expunge Moorish cultural influence from Spain, which they associated, among other things, with homosexual and cross-dressing behavior."

Pivotal impact of slavery

Lumsden paraphrased, "As Julio Le Riverend, Cuba's leading economic historian, reminds us, the development of Cuba, particularly since the 18th century, cannot be understood without recognizing the pivotal impact of slavery as a mode of production on all social relations, including domestic ones. Homosexuality among slaves occurred in a context – that is, a country whose dominant culture was both racist and homophobic."

The system of plantation slavery – both chattel and latifundia – created rural enslavement in which the masters on the island, and the masters across the Florida Straits, claimed to own the bodies and lives and labor of enslaved workers.

The patriarchal slave-masters, landowners and their overseers dictated the clothing enslaved workers could wear; where they could live and in what arrangements; when the sexes could meet; where, when and how they could have sex; if they could marry and, if so, who they could marry.

Of the more than 40,000 Asian laborers counted in the 1871 Cuban census, for example, only 66 were women and the law forbade Chinese males from marrying African-Cubans.

Enslaved African males outnumbered females by a ratio of almost two to one. Males were often housed together in isolated regions in single-sex barracones – plantation barracks – in which no women were allowed.

In his oral narrative, former enslaved African laborer Esteban Montejo told Miguel Barnet about men routinely coupling with other men in everyday life in the barracones. And he offered a glimpse at how they were gendered in relation to each other. Montejo only refers to the partner who looks after a *marido* (husband) as what the Spanish would term "sodomite." (Lumsden)

Montejo said it was only "after slavery that [the] word *afeminado* appeared."

Centralization and commodification

Capitalism and imperialism did not create homosexuality or gender variance in Cuba; these market forces centralized, commodified and commercialized them.

Rural poverty made capitalist relations – the often empty promise of jobs – a magnet that drew hundreds of thousands of campesin@s from the impoverished countryside to the cities, in particular the capital Havana, in search of wage work.

"During this period of severe sexual repression in advanced capitalist nations," Arguelles and Rich explained, "homosexual desire was often channeled into illegal and lucrative offshore markets like the Havana underworld."

The crime syndicates and wealthy Cubans with ties to the Batista dictatorship gave "preferential hiring" to Cuban homosexuals, many of them feminine and/or cross-dressing males, to serve the demand of the dollar, and those whose wallets were filled with cash.

"Other buyers of homosexual desire," Arguelles and Rich elaborated, "were the fathers and sons of the Cuban bourgeoisie, who felt free to partake of homoerotic practices without being considered homosexual as long as they did not take the passive, so-called female role in sexual relations. Yet another common practice for Cuban heterosexual men was the procurement of a lesbian prostitute's favors for a night."

Poverty drew many heterosexual Cuban men "into this underworld or alternatively into a homosexual underground dominated by the Cuban homosexual bourgeoisie," the two researchers added. The bourgeois Cuban male homosexual of this era sought out masculine men from the laboring class.

"Thus," Arguelles and Rich observed, "in many ways, pre-revolutionary homosexual liaisons in themselves fostered sexual colonialism and exploitation."

Overall, the pre-revolutionary state regulated this sex-for-profit industry, rather than repress it.

Fidel: 'We were forced to mobilize'

Shutting down the exploitative economic industries in Havana after seizure of state power was just one revolutionary task. Building a planned, productive economy that could meet the needs of 9 million urban and rural workers was a whole other job – and a difficult one, at that.

"Let me tell you about the problems we had," Cuban revolutionary leader Fidel Castro recalled. "In those first years we were forced to mobilize the whole nation because of the risks we were facing, which included that of an attack by the United States: the dirty war, the Bay of Pigs invasion, the Missile Crisis." (Ramonet)

Fidel Castro talked extensively about the UMAP in two interviews. The first was in a conversation with Tomás Borge, published in "Face to Face with Fidel Castro" (Ocean Press: 1992). The second was in conversations between 2003 and 2005 with Ignacio Ramonet, published by the Cuban Council of State in April 2006.

Recalling the period of 1965, Castro outlined three obstacles in organizing this island-wide emergency mobilization to defend the revolution and to build the economy. The first two: The CIA was beaming messages to entice skilled workers and technicians to emigrate. And members of Catholic, Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-Day Adventist religious organizations would not take up arms in defense of the island. (Ramonet)

"[A]t the triumph of the Revolution," President Castro explained, "the stage we are speaking of, the [male chauvinist] element was very much present, together

with widespread opposition to having homosexuals in military units." (Ramonet)

The Cuban leader said that as a result, "Homosexuals were not drafted at first, but then all that became a sort of irritation factor, an argument some people used to lash out at homosexuals even more.

"Taking those three categories into account we founded the so-called Military Units to Support Production (UMAP) where we sent people from the said three categories: those whose educational level was insufficient; those who refused to serve out of religious convictions; or homosexuals who were physically fit. Those were the facts; that's what happened.

"Those units were set up all throughout the country for purposes of work, mainly to assist agriculture. That is, homosexuals were not the only ones affected, though many of them certainly were, not all of them, just those who were called to do mandatory service in the ranks, since it was an obligation and everyone was participating." (Ramonet)

Sexual, gender contradictions sharpened

Revolutionary reorganization in Cuba in 1965, staring down the barrel of imperialism's cannons, had to reintegrate a numerically large homosexual/transgender population from the cities back into the rural agricultural production.

This returning workforce from the capitalist urban center had to go back to the rural agricultural production that many had left earlier in their lives.

When large numbers of feminine homosexual males returned to the countryside from Havana, it was not just a conflict of differently socialized sexual expression, but a collision between historically differently gendered workforces.

Capitalist relations had consolidated the sex-for-profit industry which had given mass expression to homosexuality and feminine expression in males, and shaped these as commodities on the auction block of the market.

The urban homosexual/gender-variant cultures, dress, mores and social semaphores seemed to many Cubans – even men who had sex with men and women who had sex with women – to have washed up on the island's shores on the waves of oppressive and exploitative capitalist and imperialist cultures.

Arguelles and Rich stressed that at the time of the revolution, "Erotic loyalty (and, in the case of women, subservience) to the opposite sex was assumed as normal even by homosexuals. Hence, for many Cubans of this era, homosexuality was a mere addendum to customary marital roles. Among others, it was just a profitable commodification of sexual fantasy. For the vast majority, homosexuality made life a shameful and guilt-ridden experience."

Fidel Castro stressed that the UMAP "were not internment units, nor were they punishment units; on the contrary, it was about morale, to give them a chance to work and help the country in those difficult circumstances. Besides, there were

'I am absolutely opposed to any form of repression, contempt, scorn or discrimination with regard to homosexuals. It is a natural tendency and human that must simply be respected.'

— Fidel Castro, 1992

many who for religious reasons had the chance to help their homeland in another way by serving not in combat units but in work units." (Ramonet)

President Castro cut cane; children worked in the fields. Renowned Cubans such as musician and poet Pablo Milanés and Baptist pastor and MP Raúl Suárez worked in the UMAP. And they stayed to help build the revolution.

The whole island was hard at work building an independent existence, in economic soil deeply furrowed by the plows of colonialism and imperialism.

Fidel shut down the UMAP

Fidel Castro stated categorically about the UMAP, "I can tell you for sure that there was prejudice against homosexuals." (Ramonet)

On the island, the Cuban National Union of Artists and Writers (UNEAC) reportedly protested treatment of homosexuals working in UMAP, prompting Fidel Castro to check it out for himself. (Hillson)

A Cuban who worked in a UMAP, interviewed by Nicaraguan poet Ernesto Cardenal in 1970-1971, related that Fidel slipped into a UMAP brigade one night and lay down in one of the hammocks. The interviewee said that the UMAP guards would sometimes cut the hammock cords with their sabers. "When one guard raised his saber he found himself staring at Fidel; he almost dropped dead. Fidel is the man of the unexpected visits." (Cardenal)

A youth described as a "young Marxist revolutionary" told Cardenal that 100 young males from the Communist Youth were sent to the UMAP to report back about how homosexuals were treated. "It was a highly secret operation. Not even their families knew of this plan. Afterward the boys told what had happened. And they put an end to the UMAP." (Hillson)

One youth concluded to Cardenal, "[W]e who were in the UMAP discovered that the Revolution and the UMAP were separable. And we said to ourselves: We won't leave Cuba, we'll stay and make what is bad not bad." (Hillson)

Fidel: 'Overcoming legacy of chauvinism'

Fidel Castro explained that during this period of early revolutionary history, "Concerning women, there was a strong prejudice, as strong as in the case of homosexuals. I'm not going to come up with excuses now, for I assume my share of the responsibility. I truly had other concepts regarding that issue. " (Ramonet)

"I am not going to deny that, at one point, male chauvinism also influenced our attitude toward homosexuality," he said. (Borge)

"We inherited male chauvinism and many other bad habits from the conquistadors. I would say that it corresponded to a given stage and is largely associated with that legacy of chauvinism." (Borge)

Castro stressed, "Homosexuals were certainly discriminated against – more so in other countries – but it happened here too, and fortunately our people, who are far more cultured and learned now, have gradually left that prejudice behind. (Ramonet)

"We have made a real advance – we can see it, especially in the young people, but we can't say that sexual discrimination has been completely wiped out and we mustn't lower our guard." (Borge)

He said, "I must also tell you that there were – and there are – extremely outstanding personalities in the fields of culture and literature, famous names this country takes pride in, who were and still are homosexual.

"Today the people have acquired a general, rounded culture. I'm not going to say there is no male chauvinism, but now it's not anywhere near the way it was back then, when that culture was so strong. With the passage of years and the growth of consciousness about all of this, we have gradually overcome problems and such prejudices have declined. But believe me, it was not easy." (Ramonet)

Fidel Castro concluded in 1992: "I am absolutely opposed to any form of repression, contempt, scorn or discrimination with regard to homosexuals. It is a natural tendency and human that must simply be respected." (Borge)

‘Before Night Falls’
Hollywood projected Cuba as ‘police state’ for gays

Hollywood turned up the volume on charges that Cuba was a “penal colony” for homosexual males with its release of “Before Night Falls” in August 2000.

The movie was based on a memoir by the late anti-communist Cuban homosexual writer Reinaldo Arenas, who emigrated to the United States in 1980. A decade later Arenas committed suicide in a dilapidated Hell’s Kitchen apartment in Manhattan, the capital of capital. Impoverished and dying as a result of AIDS, he had no health insurance and could not afford high medical costs of care – rights enjoyed by every Cuban under the revolution in his homeland.

Since the early days of the 1959 revolution, the CIA had trolled for grievances about the revolution – real, manufactured or exaggerated.

“Before Night Falls” was the pinnacle of this propaganda campaign, by virtue of having the most capital invested in its production, its cast and distribution network; the publicity generated for its release; and the accolades and awards that gave it the imprimatur of “truth.” Interspersed snippets of actual archival footage from the early days of the revolution and snippets of newsreel of Fidel Castro’s speeches aim to lend the film the appearance of historical authenticity.

As the movie begins, the cameras pan across what is actually rural Mexico, as the backdrop for Arenas’ childhood in Cuba. The reality of agricultural plantation enslavement is nowhere to be seen. Instead, the voiceover narrates that the author’s childhood was “splendor,” adding that “it was absolute poverty but also absolute freedom … .”

Projected onto movie screens, “Before Night Falls” became an imperialist-era sequel to “Gone with the Wind.”

In both reactionary propaganda films, bygone epochs of white-supremacist plantation slavery – which shackled African and Indigenous peoples – are nostalgically revived, revised and romanticized. In both films, the armies that break the manacles of slavery for profit are cast as the bad guys.

Pre-revolution: exploitation, not freedom

Viewers of “Before Night Falls” are left with the overall impression that the U.S.-backed Batista regime actually offered greater “freedom.”

In an October 2001 movie review about “Before Night Falls,” entitled “Gays in Cuba, from the Hollywood School of Falsification,” Leonardo Hechavarría and Marcel Hatch took on this fiction.

Hechavarría's biography describes him as a Cuban citizen, a translator and interpreter, and states that "he is a passionate advocate of the Revolution and works for increased acceptance of lesbians and gays in his homeland." Marcel Hatch is identified as a typographer, "a veteran gay rights activist and Cuba defender."

Hechavarría and Hatch wrote: "Before the 1959 Revolution, life for lesbians and gays was one of extreme isolation and repression, enforced by civil law, augmented by Catholic dogma. Patriarchal attitudes made lesbians invisible. If discovered, they'd often suffer sexual abuse, disgrace in the community and job loss.

"Havana's gay male underground – some 200,000 – was a purgatory of prostitution to American tourists, domestic servitude and constant threats of violence and blackmail. The closet was the operative image. Survival often meant engaging in fake heterosexual marriage, or banishment to the gay slum."For more analysis of "Before Night Falls," also see "The Sexual Politics of Reinaldo Arenas: Fact, Fiction and the Real Record of the Cuban Revolution," by Jon Hillson, at www.blythe.org.

Arguelles and Rich noted about life for the homosexual/transgender urban work force in pre-revolutionary Cuba, "If legal sanctions and official harassment were rare, this tolerance was due less to social acceptance than to overriding considerations of profit and the economic interests of the underworld that dominated the Cuban political apparatus."

But the misery of urban sexual enslavement in brothels, casinos, domestic work and drug networking is nowhere to be seen in "Before Night Falls." Neither is the apparatus of the Batista dictatorship's police, secret agents and army.

Workers' state, not bosses' state

"Before Night Falls" is the blockbuster of the propagandistic charges that the Cuban Revolution ushered in a "police state," similar to fascist Nazi Germany and the bloody 1973 counter-revolution in Chile.

These vilifications purposely confused the difference between a workers' state and a bosses' state. Understanding the class character of the Cuban workers' state is very important for those who seek their own liberation today.

Cuba was a newly developing workers' state – which had to literally battle overt and covert military onslaught and economic strangulation by U.S. imperialism. At the same time the revolution had to fight the legacy of racist, sexist and anti-homosexual/transgender indoctrination by patriarchal colonialism, capitalism and imperialism.

In contrast, the state machineries of the exploiting classes – and the church hierarchies that serve them – have always relied on repressive terror, and deepening and strengthening homophobia and transphobia, in order to conquer and rule.

For example, the Spanish colonial state in Cuba enslaved the Indigenous population on the island, castrated those it considered "sodomites," and forced them to eat their own testicles coated with dirt. (Iznada)

In order to save German capitalism, a wing of industrialists and bankers bankrolled the fascists who forced tens of thousands of gays and lesbians to wear the pink triangle in slave labor and extermination camps.

Víctor Hugo Robles wrote of Chile – where the mass of workers and peasants were not armed against the 1973 CIA-backed counter-revolution – that, "Perhaps the most forgotten are the many transvestites who were executed during the days immediately following the coup." ("The Homosexual Liberation Movement in Chile")

In the imperialist United States, homosexuality and sex/gender variance were so viciously criminalized and punished by state repression that a mass political movement arose to resist it. Despite widespread struggle, same-sex love remained illegal in the United States until 2003. Currently, in 2007, at least 65 percent of transwomen and 29 percent of transmen are estimated to have been imprisoned at some point in their life in the United States. (Critical Resistance)

And today it is U.S. imperialism that has set up concentration camps – from Abu Ghraib to Guantánamo – where anti-gay and anti-trans rape and humiliation are incorporated into the science of torture.

The state of former slaves

The Cuban workers' state, like the armies of Bolívar and Toussaint L'Ouverture, is an armed liberation struggle of the oppressed against the Goliath force of the oppressor state.

An estimated 20,000 Cubans died in two years of battling the U.S.-backed Batista dictatorship – up against bombs, aircraft and artillery. The revolution disarmed the Batista regime's army and secret police networks.

However, simply dismantling the bosses' apparatus of dictatorship did not create a new mechanism to defend the island from counter-revolution and invasion. Imperialism soon cinched an economic noose around the island, its Pentagon a constant threat.

A new state had to be built, from the ground up. It took a mass mobilization of the population to defend the gains of the revolution. The National Revolutionary Militia and the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution organized the entire population into a network against CIA-organized subterfuge and sabotage.

This block-by-block watchfulness, combined with old, deep prejudice against same-sex liaisons, made life uncomfortable for some Cuban male homosexuals. While they had experienced extreme isolation and alienation in the sexual exploitation industry, they had also found refuge in urban anonymity and privately-owned casinos, bars and other meeting places.

However, unlike its portrayal in "Before Night Falls," the Cuban workers' state was not a repressive apparatus. Rather, it had the task of defending 11 million Cubans from re-enslavement by U.S. finance capital. The Cuban Revolution could

not have survived a day, let alone a half century, without organizing and mobilizing the population to defend its independence from imperialism.

The Committees for the Defense of the Revolution and the Cuban popular militias – which armed millions of women as well as men – are the protective might of a formerly enslaved population against enraged former plantation owners, bankers, industrialists and syndicate bosses.

Arming the Cuban population of workers – rural and urban – made it possible to defeat the invasion at Playa Girón (the Bay of Pigs). At the same time, this defense allowed the revolution to boot out the U.S. sugar plantation owners and give the land back to those who tilled it. It allowed the revolution to oust U.S. industrialists and bankers, and crime syndicate bosses who ran the lucrative brothel, gambling and drug networks. The revolution began deconstructing the white supremacist and patriarchal systems that hadn't allowed Cubans of African descent to set foot on the beaches, and had kept women in servitude.

This was a workers' state.

'Dispute this fable with facts'

Calling for an end to Hollywood's blockade of Cuba, Hechavarría and Hatch stressed about "Before Night Falls": "[I]n a queer cinemagraphic twist, it erases the achievements of Cuban toilers, women, people of color, and indeed gays, who've made stupendous advances since 1959.

"The end of hunger, homelessness, illiteracy, high infant mortality, and foreign domination of the island are of course undeniable – all fruits of the Revolution."

After the revolution, "advances for women in general were naturally extended to lesbians, and many became among the most ardent defenders of the revolution. On the other hand, a significant minority of gay men left Cuba. Some joined the counter-revolutionary expatriates in Miami or were blackmailed into doing so. Ironically, the U.S., which was busy flushing out and jailing its homosexuals during the McCarthy period, welcomed Cuban gays as part of its overall campaign to destabilize the island." (Hatch)

Hechavarría and Hatch added: "It was Clinton/Bush [Sr.]-inspired destiny that a hot button pushing, gay-themed anti-Cuba melodrama would be released. The peristent myth, promulgated chiefly by right-wing Cuban-Americans (most of whom are hyper-homophobes), that homosexuality is illegal in Cuba, that gays and lesbians are banned from the Communist Party, and that they are savaged and tossed in the slammer, is pure bunk."

Hechavarría and Hatch stated categorically: "We know of no Cuban, for or against their government, who finds the movie credible. Nor do smart gay activists.

"This political falsity," they concluded, "has widespread currency among liberal skeptics and within the queer community [in the U.S.] It is to this audience the film was targeted. It is necessary for friends of Cuba to dispute this fable with facts."

Homosexuality and Cuba
1970s: Decade of cultural progress

Those who today are working to seize state power and defend and build a workers' state in their own countries may be sobered as well as heartened by the enormous cultural labor that the Cuban Revolution had to accomplish in the 1970s, particularly regarding liberation of women, sexuality and gendered social roles.

Arguelles and Rich concluded in their 1984 study of Cuba that three events "marked the gradual but continual improvement of life conditions of gay men and lesbians in Cuba during the seventies: the First National Congress on Education and Culture, the promulgation of the Family Code, and the creation of a national group on sexual education."

Arguelles and Rich explain that at the 1971 Congress on Education and Culture, "On the one hand, homosexuality was not referred to as a product of decadence and homosexuality was no longer seen by the revolutionary leadership as a fundamental problem in Cuban society, but, rather, viewed as a form of sexual behavior requiring study.

"On the other hand, declarations from the same congress called for the removal of homosexuals from the field of education, thus continuing the view of homosexuality as a contamination of the body politic."

The 1971 congress declaration demoralized some activists worldwide who had hoped that the seizure of state power in Cuba would usher in an immediate and thorough-going theoretical, social and economic transformation.

Some activists succumbed to fear that prejudice is a hard-wired human trait that can't ever be eradicated from any human society, even a socialist one.

Anti-communists have also tried to use the 1971 congress document in attempts to discredit the revolutionary process altogether.

Both are ample reason to look more closely.

Roots of prejudice

Studying Cuba's specific historical economic and social conditions opens up greater understanding about what generates prejudice against same-sex love and gender variance, as well as racism, and opens up clarity about what kind of material changes are necessary to eventually uproot all forms of bigotry.

Prejudice – ideology that pits groups within the vast laboring and oppressed class worldwide against each other – is not the same as superstition. Superstitions are explanations concerning the material world that the scientific process later

proves are untrue. Attempts to supplant that new, scientific understanding with old superstitions are consciously reactionary.

Prejudices, however, are rooted in the historical development of class-divided societies. They are used as a conscious ideological campaign to frustrate mass unity among the laboring masses over millennia. These lies, minted like gold, have only profited emperors and kings, landowners and barons.

"The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas," observed Karl Marx, "i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force."

Colonialism and imperialism didn't just bring reactionary ideas. The patriarchal ruling-class ideologies they enforced served to buttress their structures of enslavement of Cuba, as elsewhere.

Spanish colonialism backed up its edicts against same-sex love in Cuba with Inquisition terror, and its church imbued this sexuality with shame and guilt.

Imperialism swiftly centralized and shaped what became a numerically huge new urban homosexual/gender-variant subculture, mostly male, within the larger culture(s) in Cuba for the sole purpose of sexual exploitation for profit. Tens of thousands of Cuban women and girls, including many enslaved in "domestic" jobs, were ruthlessly sexually exploited, as well.

So it is not difficult to understand why homosexuality, coupled with gender variance, would seem to be a product of "bourgeois decadence" in Cuba. And it's not hard to understand why many Cubans believed that homosexuality and gender varience would go away with the shutting down of these non-productive, exploitative industries.

But the 1971 cultural congress marked the moving away from that assumption.

Changing ideas

Revolution is not a single act, it's a process. The revolution created the basis for social and economic transformation that has been profound and is ongoing, a particularly remarkable achievement carried out under almost half a century of imperialist siege.

The first tasks of the revolution in Cuba were to organize to provide jobs, food, shelter, health care and education for the entire population and to defend the new revolutionary state against imperialist attack.

At the same time, the 1959 Cuban Revolution faced the odious task of cleaning out the Augean stables filled with 450 years of rotting, stinking oppressor culture excreted by Spanish colonialism and U.S. imperialism. And the U.S. tried to take away every shovel that the Cubans needed to do that work.

While deep divisions based on bigotry help facilitate and maintain colonial and imperialist economic rule, every form of ideological prejudice – white supremacy,

male supremacy and anti-homosexual bigotry – breaks up the unity required to collectively build a socialist economy.

The 1971 congress declaration pointed out that, "For the bourgeoisie, the elimination of the cultural elements of its class and system represents the elimination of culture as such.

"For the working class and people in general, the culture born of the revolutionary struggle is the conquest and development of the most valuable of humanity's cultural heritage which the exploiters kept from them for centuries."

The 1971 congress declaration stressed that "[T]he changes in the field of sexual relations stem from society itself as it progresses in the social, cultural and economic fields and continues to acquire an ideology that is more consistently revolutionary."

Fidel: 'tangible and practical successes'

Looking back from the vantage point of 1992, Cuban revolutionary leader Fidel Castro told Tomás Borge, a priest and founder of the Sandinista National Liberation Front, "We inherited male chauvinism and many other bad habits from the conquistadors. That was an historical inheritance. In some countries more than in others, but in none was there more struggle than in ours and I believe that in none have there been more tangible and practical successes." (Borge)

Fidel Castro recalled, in a series of interviews between 2003 and 2005, "[W]e had to work very hard to do away with racial prejudice here. Concerning women, there was strong prejudice, as strong as in the case of homosexuals." (Ramonet)

Castro had told Borge, "There was, for example, one standard for judging the personal conduct of a man and another for a woman. We had this situation for years in the party and I led fights and argued a lot about this. If there was infidelity in a marriage on behalf of the man, there was no problem, no worry, on the other hand it was a subject of discussion in the party units when there was infidelity on the part of the woman. There was one way of judging sexual relations of men and another of women. I had to fight hard, against deeply rooted tendencies that were not the product of any sermon or doctrine, or education, but the male chauvinist concepts and prejudices that exist in the heart of our society."

Castro added, "I am not going to deny that, at one point, male chauvinism also influenced our attitudes towards homosexuality."

He explained to Ramonet, "There was less prejudice against homosexuals in the most cultured and educated sectors, but that prejudice was very strong in sectors of low educational level – the illiteracy rate was around 30 percent those years – and among the nearly-illiterate, and even among many professionals. That was a real fact in our society." (Ramonet)

One of the first actions of the revolution in 1960 – the Year of Education – was to organize volunteers to teach 700,000 adults to read. Cuba rapidly reached the highest literacy rate in Latin America.

Fidel Castro metaphorically answered the idealist concept of change with a scientific materialist view in an interview with a Galician television station in Spain in 1988. He talked about how the cultural mass process of the revolution deepened understanding about same-sex love.

"God needed seven days to make the world," he said, "you must understand that to remake this world, to destroy a world like that which we had here and to make a new one, there wasn't much light, and at first there was a lot of darkness, and a lot of confusion about a series of problems. Our society, our party, our government now have ideas that are clearer, wiser and more intelligent about many of these problems. Given that we can make mistakes, we obsessively follow the idea of what is just, right and best for the people, and what is the most humane for our people and our society. However, the task is not easy. I think that each time we get closer to the right criteria for making the world we want."

Revolution: 'school of unfettered thought'

Fidel Castro said in a now-famous 1962 talk that the "Revolution must be a school of unfettered thought."

The intellectual and cultural dynamism of the Cuban Revolution, which combined communist leadership with mass participation, is evident in the trajectory of progress in the 1970s made concerning women and same-sex love.

The Cuban leaders continued to organize mass forums for discussion and debate that empowered changes concerning sexuality, sex and gendered social roles.

Two years after the 1971 congress declaration that no homosexual should officially represent the country, it was overruled by a Cuban court. (Hatch)

In 1975, the limits on employment of homosexuals in the arts and education were overturned by the Cuban Supreme Court, which ruled in favor of gay artists who were petitioning for compensation and reinstatement in their workplace. (cuba-solidarity.org.uk)

That same year, a revolutionary Family Code was adopted that called for equal participation by men in child-raising and household work.

Also in 1975, a new Ministry of Culture was established, as well as a commission to study homosexuality. That commission helped pave the road for the formal decriminalization of same-sex love.

But U.S. imperialism, which had economically exploited the homosexual/transgender population of Cuba before the revolution, continued to exploit them politically.

Imperialist blockade and CIA anti-gay extortion
Behind the 1980 'Mariel boatlift'

Several thousand self-identified homosexual Cubans were among the some 120,000 who left the island over a two-month period in 1980 from the port of Mariel and sailed to the U.S. The media in the imperialist countries, whose capitalist classes were hell-bent on re-colonizing Cuba, broadcast an anti-communist interpretation of what produced that migration at Mariel.

Workers World Party founder Sam Marcy wrote, "The 1970s were the high point in Cuba's revolutionary influence, not only in Latin America but in Africa, Asia and even Europe. Cuba was part of a worldwide surge in the working-class movement and particularly among oppressed countries. U.S. imperialism was on the defensive, especially after its historic defeat in Vietnam and its inability to either crush or tame the Cuban Revolution." (Marcy)

Cuban women and men were fighting bravely alongside their African comrades to defend the people of Angola, Namibia and Ethiopia from colonialism and imperialism.

U.S. finance capital tried to isolate and destroy the Cuban Revolution.

U.S. banks and corporations commanded Washington not to recognize Cuba's right to diplomatic recognition. Captains of the military-industrial complex ordered their generals and admirals to attack the island using various weapons – covert and overt – including enforcement of the economic blockade of the island, which is an illegal act of war. The Pentagon refused to retreat from the military base it built at Guantánamo – now a site where the interrogators incorporate anti-gay and anti-trans humiliation, rape and attempted dehumanization as part of their sadistic torture of Muslim men and boys.

And 1980 was the year that Ronald Reagan won the White House.

Marcy concluded, "A period began when the most intense economic, political and diplomatic pressure was exerted on Cuba. In the background was always the threat of U.S. military intervention, causing the Cuban government to spend a great deal of its resources on military defense."

CIA targeted homosexual Cubans

Between 1979 and 1984 – before and after Mariel – scholars Lourdes Arguelles and B. Ruby Rich interviewed Cuban émigrés in the U.S., Spain, Mexico and Puerto Rico. The two researchers also interviewed Cubans who chose to stay on the island and be a part of building a socialist society.

Arguelles and Rich revealed how U.S. finance capital used its secret CIA police agency to politically target the same Cuban homosexual/transgender population it had once exploited for profit.

"The year 1979 was an unsettled one," Arguelles and Rich wrote. "Even though living conditions were better than in any previous period and compared favorably with those in the rest of the Caribbean, there were serious problems." They pointed out that the economy suffered under the heavy weight of the U.S. blockade and suspicious outbreaks of biological epidemics destroyed harvests of cash crops. This forced Cubans to work harder and faster and for longer hours in order to raise overall productivity.

The U.S. allowed Cubans who had emigrated in the early years of the revolution to travel back to the island. Arguelles and Rich noted, "The visits of 'the American cousins' increased consumer envy and added to the effectiveness of counter-revolutionary propaganda.

"Lesbians and gay men were particularly vulnerable," they explained. "The CIA targeted the homosexual intelligentsia and worked to persuade its members to defect, promising generous academic grants and publishing contracts."

Arguelles and Rich continued, "The more cost-effective ploy of blackmail was also used, especially against those gays less willing to leave, in the hope that political anxiety would force victims into exile. Carlos Alberto Montaner, a Madrid-based anti-Castro writer, for example, published two full pages listing names of homosexuals inside Cuba in an attempt to discredit them and to encourage them to migrate. Such cynical 'assistance' in coming out continues to be a favored weapon against lesbians and gay men who are well integrated into the revolution."

The two researchers added, "The visits also provided a context in which Cuban lesbians and gay men could hear of the more open and affluent gay lifestyles available in the United States as a benefit of consumer capitalism. Other common reasons for wanting to emigrate included the lack of career mobility in a still under-developed economy and, for men, a traditional desire for the adventure of travel that had to focus on emigration since the United States and other capitalist nations deny tourist visas to Cubans. For some Cuban gays (especially for the men), emigration also provided wider sexual parameters than they felt could ever be possible in Cuba."

Exception to a rotten rule

U.S. imperialism demonstrated how its laws either kneel to its overall capitalist class objectives, or are forced to bend.

After the Cuban Revolution shut down U.S. finance capital's burgeoning sex and casino industries that had exploited mass numbers of homosexuals, U.S. im-

migration authorities unofficially lifted the part of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1952 that had been used to bar and deport those it labeled "sexually deviant" – but only for homosexual Cubans.

Washington lured Cubans to risk their lives at sea by creating an exception to immigration rules and quotas that barred legal migration to the U.S. Any Cuban who arrived on U.S. soil was promised admission, with perks.

Cuban President Fidel Castro challenged Washington's immigration manipulation and hypocrisy by opening the port at Mariel from April 21 to Sept. 28 in 1980, allowing any Cubans who wanted to leave to go to the U.S. Some 120,000 Cubans left, out of the country's total population of 11 million.

Even the estimates of how many homosexual Cubans left from Mariel in 1980 demonstrate political manipulation by the U.S. government.

Reporting for the publication *Paris Match*, Nina Sutton cited a "nonofficial State Department source" as saying at least 10,000 Cuban homosexuals had emigrated at Mariel. However, Julia Preston stated in the New York *Village Voice* dated Dec. 10-16, 1980, that "As many as 3,000 gay Cubans passed through refugee camps this summer. Now about 350 are left, almost all men, the others having been sponsored out mainly to gay communities throughout the country."

Gay Cubans were not welcomed into the homosexual-hating, right-wing-dominated Cuban émigré enclaves and anti-communist organizations.

Under state duress

At U.S. borders, all individual immigrants face tremendous pressure under interrogation from border police, immigration judges and officials and in detention centers.

Arguelles and Rich explained in 1984 that "Cuban 'refugee' testimony and subsequent conversations with the newly arrived Cubans, for example, becomes the main source for evaluation of Cuban gay life, despite knowledge of the pressures on émigrés to testify to political persecution in their country of origin in order to attain the legal and economic advantages of refugee status in their new country."

Arguelles and Rich stated, "The success of this interpretation has served anti-Cuban interests, most notably the American state, rather well. First, credibility of the story has neutralized badly needed support for the Cuban revolution among its natural allies (North American progressive lobbies) and legitimated the presence in traditionally liberal circles of some of the more reactionary elements within the Cuban émigré population."

1980: Homosexuality
'A visible feature of Cuban society'

The thunderous, monopolized voice of the U.S. media machine dwelled on homosexuals who left Cuba from the port of Mariel in 1980, omitting the role of the CIA in instigating migration. At the same time, the U.S.-led political blockade of Cuba silenced the voices of Cubans who chose to stay, working together to actively defend their workers' state against the most powerful imperialist empire in history.

Arguelles and Rich stated, with the clarity of courage, "For all the gay men and the few lesbians who left, there were many more who chose to stay. Their lives had been constantly improving. The revolution might not yet speak to the homosexual in them, but it continued to address other vital aspects of their being." These Cubans, they reported, "steadfastly refused to fulfill their gay identity at the cost of their national and political identities."

Few lesbians left from Mariel, Arguelles and Rich found. "Their small number by comparison with that of gay men points, again, to the fuller integration of women into Cuban society and the increased status and freedom enjoyed by lesbians, as women, under the revolution."

Ada, a lesbian Cuban rural nurse, said that everything in Cuba wasn't "perfect." But, she said, "I remember how it was before [the revolution] and for the first time, I feel I'm a human being.'" (Arguelles)

Arguelles and Rich reported that in this period of their research – 1979 to 1984 – the homosexual population was "a visible feature of the Cuban social landscape" – part of every sphere of economic, social and governmental organization, as well as at the point of production of art and other forms of culture.

Arguelles and Rich observed, "They are no longer confined to an underworld economy or alienated from the mainstream of social life as they were in the pre-revolutionary era. Particular individuals are well known and pointed to with pride as evidence of revolutionary non-discrimination."

They reported finding "a flourishing homosexual social scene centered around private parties and particular homes." They described this social networking at parties and beaches as "a feature of Havana life in general."

Arguelles and Rich added, "While their sexuality may be an open secret inside Cuba, many lesbians and gay males who participate in cultural and academic exchanges with the United States become more guarded when abroad, fearful of how homosexual issues are utilized in the war against the Cuban revolution.

"But many still take the opportunity to visit lesbian and gay bars and bath houses in New York or San Francisco," Arguelles and Rich pointed out in the mid-1980s. "Ironically, their own adjustment to a greater social integration in Cuba causes them increasingly to feel out of place in these sites, viewing their sexual consumerism as bizarre."

Jorge, a Cuban artist, concluded that "there is more true sexuality for gays in Cuba." (Arguelles and Rich)

Arguelles and Rich returned to the island after their research had been published in Spanish in the Mexican newspaper *La Jornada*. The response they got from lesbian and gay Cubans was that "Overwhelmingly, they felt that progress was more marked than we suggested and that conditions of daily life had significantly improved during this decade."

A gay Cuban named Roberto who said he had left from Mariel "for the adventure" went back to Cuba to visit. Roberto's experiences in the U.S. drew him to the Antonio Maceo Brigade – pro-revolutionary Cubans in Miami and New Jersey. (Hillson)

When Roberto returned to the island, he visited the factory in which he used to work. His co-workers had known he was homosexual. As Roberto got up to speak to an assembly of 700 of his former factory co-workers, they all rose to give him a standing ovation.

Lift the blockade!

Cubans who are homosexual, transgender and transsexual did not need imperialism to "liberate" them from their own people, their own revolution. They needed and deserved support from the revolutionary and progressive movements in the U.S. – the citadel of anti-Cuban finance capital – and around the world to help defeat imperialism.

Cubans of all sexualities, genders and sexes were suffering, and are still suffering, under the economic warfare of the U.S. blockade.

In addition, the blockade impacted on sexual and gender expression on the island. For example, it put enormous strain on housing, which in turn determines literally how much room and privacy people have to explore their sexual curiosity and desire.

The constant state of military alert demanded a mass mobilization of Cuban women, as well as men, in a collective effort for national defense. Revolutionary military preparedness values courage and strength, dignity and discipline. For half a millennium, colonialism and imperialism had extolled these virtues as birth traits of masculine males.

Colonial ideology, backed up by the ruling church and state, enforced masculine gender expression in males. The Spanish military and church introduced anti-homosexual epithets that seared like branding irons, as its state cruelly punished same-sex love and gender variance.

The most common slur hurled at male homosexuals, which has endured from the medieval Inquisition in Europe, translates into English as "stick of wood." It refers to the feudal European punishment of burning alive at the stake males who had sex with other males, or those deemed inappropriately gendered. Colonialism brought the fire of the Inquisition with its armadas. In the mid-1600s, for example, the Spanish captain general who ruled over the rural and urban enslaved population of Cuba sentenced 20 "effeminate sodomites" to be burned alive.

The anti-gay epithet – hurled at those not considered "manly" enough – has another meaning: coward. It's an accusation faced by those who fled Cuba in the Mariel boatlift.

However, the idea that femininity is "weak" or "cowardly" is a gender prejudice that all feminine people – male-bodied, female-bodied or intersexual – have a common interest in debunking. Feminine Cuban women, for example, have played a heroic role in the revolution – militarily as well as politically

Cuban community defense and military ranks, however, were organizing and mobilizing the entire population as a popular army to defend the collective gains of the Cuban Revolution, not inculcating the kind of Rambo-masculinity indoctrination that the Pentagon drills into its ranks of the foot soldiers of an imperialist empire. Cuba's foreign policy, by contrast, was the export of revolutionary solidarity.

1970s Cuba

Sex education campaign battled old prejudices

Eva Bjorklund wrote in *Swedish-Cuba* magazine in 2000: "In 1977, the Center for Sexual Education (CNES) [later Cenesex] was founded on the initiative of the Cuban Women's Federation (FMC) and their seminars and publications encouraged a more enlightened outlook on homosexuality and started to undermine traditional prejudices and taboos. The work done by this center has contributed to changes in attitudes and laws, and the credit for the fact that the AIDS problem has not been handled with a homophobic outlook is largely attributed to this endeavor." (Bjorklund)

Bjorklund noted: "Before the Center for Sexual Education (CNES) started its work, sexual education was a practically unknown phenomenon in Cuba, as in the rest of Latin America, where the stand and the attitude of the Catholic Church has continued to curb any attempted change. In this light, Cuba's sexual education is groundbreaking."

Cuban women led the way forward.

Dr. Celestino Álvarez Lajonchere, then-director of the National Institute of Sex Education in Havana, recalled in a 1986 interview: "In 1974, the Federation of Cuban Women has already insisted that sex education had to be done. They had been working on this since the early 1960s." (Fee)

The interview with Álvarez – known on the island as "Tino" – was conducted with Elizabeth Fee, Joan Furman-Seaborg and Ross Conner. Margaret Gilpin arranged the interview and did the translation.

In the interview, Álvarez stressed: "The First Party Congress reviewed all of the things that the Federation has asked for and converted them into a political directive. This is the only country in the world where the people who have suffered from the consequences of ignorance, principally women and young people, did not have to spend one minute to convince the highest levels of leadership of the country that something had to be done. On the contrary, the political leadership was always worried that they weren't doing enough of what the women expected them to do. I am convinced that that doesn't happen in any other country in the world. I think that's important – very important."

Álvarez continued: "The First Party Congress of 1975 agreed on the declaration of the complete and absolute equality of women. The elaboration of that declaration included the need to organize a system of sex education. They needed a plan to create, for example, illustrated texts, and educational materials for the population. The National Assembly of People's Power then created a permanent commission. Within that commission they created a working group, the National Institute of Sex Education. The structure is very important. I don't think that in any country in the world, including the socialist world, does this kind of structure exist, except here."

He added, "With this kind of task, to create a national plan, you can't leave it in the hands of one person or a group of people or to one organization; it has to be done throughout the entire society."

One of the first suggestions the Ministry of Education made was to begin elementary sex education from the earliest years. But Cuba was still trying to build enough schools and train enough teachers to meet the educational needs of the population. Álvarez said his youngest child's teachers at that time in secondary school in the countryside were just two or three years older than their students.

"It was difficult for the Ministry of Education under these circumstances," he stated, "to assume responsibility for a national program in sex education.

"The first task was to prepare some texts on the subject, because there weren't any."

Ground-breaking first publication

Álvarez explained, "We decided to make a selection from the most highly developed socialist country in this area, East Germany, and we selected the books that we thought would best cover our needs."

The first ground-breaking publication in Cuba was Sigfried Schnabl's "The Intimate Life of Males and Females" (El hombre y la mujer en la intimidad). The book had been published first in the German Democratic Republic – the East German workers' state – in 1978.

Bjorklund wrote that Sigfried Schnabl's book, which was "translated and edited in Cuba in 1979, clearly states that 'homosexuals should be granted equal rights, respect and recognition, and that any kind of social discrimination is reprehensible.' This book served as guidance for the work of CNES and at pedagogical colleges."

In their article in the Summer 1980 Gay Insurgent, Stephen J. Risch and Randolph E. Wills noted, "In fact it was the Women's Federation which saw the book as so important that it successfully lobbied for its publication considerably ahead of schedule (since there are limited resources for publishing books in Cuba, finished manuscripts must wait in line to be published)."

Álvarez remembers that the subject was so popular: "We sold it in a special way to try and guarantee that it would get into the hands of doctors, other health personnel and teachers. We sold it at about 5 pesos, but in addition, the buyer had to have a paper signed by me saying that he or she had the right to buy the book. Otherwise, the books would have disappeared from the bookstores within two hours."

The law against same-sex love was removed the same year that the book was published in 1979 – almost a quarter century before the U.S. government followed suit under pressure from a mass lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans movement.

A subsequent publication, "Are You Beginning to Think about Love?" translated and edited in Cuba in 1981, "was more ambivalent," wrote Bjorklund. "It was intended for a broad audience and argued that homosexuals have the same ability to function in society as other people, but that they can never be as happy as married people. Mónika Krause, a leading expert at CNES, admitted that this was a response to criticism against the first edition of Schnabl's book, for being too positive towards homosexuality. A second edition of Schnabl's book, intended to be printed in 250,000 copies, although delayed because of the economic crisis, however, persisted, stressing that sexual violation of minors has no causal relationship to sexual orientation, dismissing the theories of seduction into homosexuality, and emphasizing that since nobody is responsible for his or her sexual orientation, homosexuals must be just as respected as heterosexuals."

Álvarez said the next step in sex education was a paperback entitled "When Your Child Asks You" (Cuando tu hijo te pregunta), first printed in 1980. It was offered for public sale with a book aimed at sex education for children aged 9 to 12. "We did simple illustrations showing the process of reproduction. This was the best way to start trying to break the prejudices of the population," he stated. "We were trying to tell parents that they didn't have any alternative, they had to tell children about these things, because their kids were going to deal with them for better or for worse. It was up to the parents to answer their kids' questions and they needed to know how to do that."

A fourth publication, "Thinking About Love?" (¿Piensas ya en el amor?), was designed for teenagers. Álvarez explained: "This book covers sexually transmitted diseases and discusses some of the emotional aspects of how children become adults and what adult relations are all about. It deals with some of the problems that have to do with being in love, and also talks about contraception."

Yet another book was written for children from 3 to 7 years old, entitled "Mama, Papa and Me" (Mamá, papá, y yo). Álvarez said, "It was the only one that didn't sell out immediately, the way all the rest of them did, and we think that's a sign of some resistance to our work in the population."

In 1981, the Cuban Ministry of Culture produced a publication titled "In Defense of Love" that stated homosexuality was a variant of human sexuality. Cuba-solidarity.org.uk concluded that the book "argued that homophobic bigotry was an unacceptable attitude inherited by the Revolution and that all sanctions against gays should be opposed."

This ground-breaking work on sex education, in which Cuban women played such a leadership role, helped pave the road for a scientific and humane approach to the AIDS epidemic that put the imperialist countries to shame. ▼

Dealing with AIDS Crisis

Cuba mobilized before first diagnosis

The Reagan administration tried to whip up world anger at Cuba's handling of the AIDS epidemic. In reality, Cuba took an immediate, scientific and humane approach to people with AIDS.

In the U.S., AIDS was first diagnosed in 1981. By May 2, 1983, simultaneous gay and lesbian protests of tens of thousands had to take to the streets in New York City, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Houston, Atlanta, Chicago and Milwaukee under banners reading "Fighting for our lives!" to demand federal funds to battle AIDS, and for research, services and Social Security benefits.

A day later, activists organized a telephone blitz of the White House to protest government inaction and to demand funds. It was the largest number of calls to the Oval Office in a single day in its history. The president had still not publicly said the word AIDS, while theo-cons demonized the emerging health crisis as a "gay plague."

By contrast, Cuba's health care workers began preparations to defend the whole population from the AIDS epidemic two years before the first case was diagnosed on the island in 1985. Cuba spared no expense despite the chokehold of the U.S.-led blockade.

Cuba – unlike the U.S. – mobilized against AIDS, not against people with AIDS. Arguelles and Rich observed in the autumn of 1987 that, "Cuba is unusual in publicizing the disease, not as a gay disease, but rather as a sexually transmitted disease regardless of specific sexual practice."

Planning to protect population

After members of the Cuban Health Ministry took part in a workshop organized by the Pan-American Health Organization in August 1983, they immediately set up a national commission to research and create a plan of action to prevent AIDS in Cuba. (Wald)

The commission immediately blocked the import of all blood products from countries in which the epidemic was already documented. The commission recommended discarding more than 20,000 vials of imported blood, worth millions of dollars.

Getting rid of all imported blood products greatly burdened the Cuban health system and forced the country to ratchet up local production. However, this urgent action resulted in avoiding HIV transmission to almost all hemophiliacs and others who needed blood transfusions. (Cookson)

A multi-disciplinary team of doctors and researchers was assigned to work full time on AIDS. Political journalist Karen Wald wrote, "Their first move was to prepare a diagnostic screening program based on concrete symptoms that could be seen in hospitals, such as repeated cases of pneumonia or Kaposi's sarcoma type of cancer, which indicated possible AIDS. Hospitals were asked to give weekly reports on findings of these symptoms."

Doctors tested more than 135,000 Cubans for HIV in 1983.

Science, not stigma

In 1985, a Cuban who had returned from abroad was the first in the country to be diagnosed with AIDS. The Cuban was one of 300,000 heroes of the revolution who helped defend the people of Mozambique – an African country impoverished by colonialism and battling the forces of imperialism.

In the U.S., Africa and Haiti were being scapegoated as the source of the epidemic, without any scientific proof. In Cuba, however, where many are of African descent because of the history of slavery, health officials did not stigmatize the African continent.

In an interview in Cuba International, circa 1987, Dr. Rodolfo Rodríguez, then the national director of epidemiology for the Cuban Ministry of Health, said that while some of the mass media at that time might have been trying to blame the African continent for AIDS, "It is known worldwide that it is the developed Western countries – Europe and the U.S. – that have the largest number of AIDS cases and the largest number of asymptomatic carriers."

In the U.S., homosexuality was still against the law and viciously repressed. The right wing labeled AIDS a "gay disease." This only drove the epidemic deeper into the population. So too did the criminalization of drug addiction and prostitution, both highly profitable industries in the U.S.

Neither friend nor foe of the Cuban Revolution has ever reported any indication of the social crisis of intravenous drug use on the island. And same-sex love was not against the law in Cuba.

Cuban health workers tested all pregnant women, people with sexually transmitted diseases, and anyone who might have had sexual contact with someone who was HIV positive. Testing equipment was installed in blood bank centers. (Aguilera)

By the end of 1985, Wald wrote, the Cuban government had purchased, despite great expense, all the technical means to screen the island's entire blood supply. "Cuba spent more than $3 million to buy the reactive agents and equipment, and to set up labs in blood banks and hygiene and epidemiology centers around the country."

That year, the Cuban public health system allocated $2 million for the National HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Program, which focused on providing the first 750,000 diagnostic kits and centers. (Editors: "Cuba's HIV-AIDS Rate")

Capitalism and contraception

The years of sex education that preceded the outbreak of the epidemic helped to create the basis for a more scientific and compassionate approach to people with AIDS.

However, when faced with a sexually transmissible epidemic like AIDS, Cuba had to overcome a particular capitalist legacy regarding safer-sex education and practices.

Dr. Celestino Álvarez Lajonchere, a gynecologist and ground-breaking sex educator in Cuba, reminded interviewers in 1988, "You know this country inherited a system in which the rural areas and small towns had little or no medical care before the revolution." (Fee)

He added that before the revolution, illegal abortions were common. They were most often performed by doctors, without anesthesia, in unsanitary conditions.

Álvarez Lajonchere explained: "At the triumph of the revolution, the majority of these abortion doctors left the country. There was no habit in the country of using contraceptives, and contraception did not even appear in the medical school curriculum. … The private physicians at the time didn't give contraceptive services to their patients because they could charge much more doing abortions."

As a result, he said, "Since people didn't have contraceptive habits, we encountered serious difficulties in the first years after the triumph of the revolution."

While half of all Cuban doctors left the island and went to capitalist countries, 97 percent of the physicians in obstetrics and gynecology emigrated. As a result, Álvarez Lajonchere noted, overnight he became the oldest gynecologist/obstetrician in the country.

Álvarez Lajonchere said that, in addition, within months after the workers and peasants took state power, "[A]ll of the professors at the medical school quit voluntarily, thinking mistakenly that the government could not replace them. The government accepted their resignations. It was a policy in the country, and still is, that if you really don't want to live in this country under socialism you should leave. You can't create a socialist society with people who are disaffected.

"So the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Public Health got together a course for new professors," he continued, "people who could never have been professors before the revolution because of their low social class origins – they didn't come from the upper middle classes."

The medical school faculty was replaced with new professors. "We all left private practice and went to teach. It was an extraordinary advantage that we knew the conditions of medical practice in the country. I became chief of the department of obstetrics and gynecology at the one and only medical school. The first thing I did was to put contraception into the medical school curriculum. There were never any restrictions about who could have access to contraceptives in this country: not by age, not by race, not by anything."

Álvarez Lajonchere added, "Medical services from the very beginning have been free." And the new medical teachers received a higher salary than the president. (Fee)

"The habit of using contraceptives," Álvarez Lajonchere explained, "is a habit that takes time to build. For a population that was accustomed to having abortions, it was easier for them to go to the hospital and have an abortion."

After the revolution, underground abortions in unsanitary conditions increased until 1965. "When we started to do all of them in hospitals, obviously deaths as a result of abortion disappeared."

He added that the number of abortions began to decrease in 1974 as a result of mass education about sex and contraception.

Álvarez Lajonchere concluded: "Our current policy on population is the same policy that we've had from the first day of the revolution. It's a policy of principle. A woman has the right to have the number of children she wants, and to have them when she wants. The government is obligated to assure that her right becomes a reality. So we educate people about all of the contraceptive methods. We include abortion, even though we don't view it as a contraceptive method, so that people will know about it. We have never said that having a small family is good; we have never pressured people to reduce the birth rate."

AIDS quarantine in Cuba
Care & prevention, not repression

From both a scientific and human standpoint, the AIDS sanatoria health care facilities in Cuba bore no relation to the threat of state quarantine in the U.S.

In the U.S., there was no scientific merit to public proposals to empower the state for surveillance and quarantine of people believed to have AIDS. There was no way to identify how many people out of the vast population had already been exposed. The epidemic was already entrenched by the mid-1980s. AIDS was not spread through casual contact. And anti-gay and racist scapegoating, laws against same-sex love, immigrant bashing, and laws against IV drug use and prostitution had generated fear of the state, as well as of coming forward for testing or treatment. The prohibitive costs of medical care, particularly for those without health insurance, also barred many from seeking health care.

So threats of state investigation and forced isolation only drove the epidemic deeper underground. Yet on March 2, 1984, *USA Today* revealed that California officials were legally pursuing the ability to forcibly quarantine people believed to have AIDS. The same month, the Democratic co-chair of the Connecticut General Assembly's Judiciary Committee introduced broad quarantine legislation after a racist media campaign demonized a Black woman, accused of prostitution and drug addiction, who was reported to have AIDS.

Even as politicians were refusing to allocate the funds necessary to meet the AIDS public health emergency, the racist big-business media were accusing Haitian immigrants in the U.S. of spreading AIDS.

The late AIDS activist Michael Callen told *Workers World* at that time that the press for quarantine powers was "not really to protect people but to further certain political goals, to further isolate already disenfranchised people." Callen said that the singling out of a Black woman in Connecticut and allegations without scientific basis that Haiti and Africa were the sources of the epidemic were attempts "to blame all calamity on the Third World." (Feinberg, "The government didn't care")

Gay men and bisexuals were blamed for the epidemic for much the same reason that the church hierarchy in the Middle Ages accused Jewish people of creating bubonic plague by "poisoning the wells."

Media in the South and Jerry Falwell's right-wing fundamentalist publication *Moral Majority Inc.* editorialized that AIDS was God's "deserved punishments" against homosexuals. (aidssurvivalproject.org)

Far-right columnist Patrick Buchanan titled his commentary: "AIDS Disease: It's Nature Striking Back."

That's why the late Bobbi Campbell, a San Francisco registered nurse with AIDS, told *Workers World* in 1984 how concerned he was about the political abuses of broad quarantine measures in the U.S. He warned, "We would see gay men locked up en masse and it is possible in more backward localities that lesbians could be included in that." ("Bobbi Campbell calls for solidarity")

The U.S. government declared war on people with AIDS rather than marshal funds and forces to deal with the epidemic.

Science, not scapegoating

By contrast, Cuba – an island nation of 11 million that was blockaded by U.S. imperialism – had prepared its health care system for the epidemic two years before its first diagnosis of an AIDS case. So when AIDS first emerged in the population, it could be easily identified and isolated before being spread to the rest of the people.

In 1986, Cuba opened up 13 sanatoria that provided care for 99 people, only 20 percent of whom were believed to have contracted AIDS through same-sex contact. (Aguilera)

Joseph Mutti wrote from Havana in June 1999, "Once a person has tested HIV-positive, attempts are made to trace everyone who had sexual contact with the person. Given Cubans' general openness about their sexuality, and Cuba's cradle-to-grave health care system, it's usually possible to ascertain how and when a person was infected.

"The basic principle of the Cuban public health-care system, widely recognized as the Third World's best," Mutti explained, "is to prioritize the health of the population as a whole instead of focusing exclusively on individual care. This is important for understanding HIV/AIDS policies, including the sanatorium system that earned Cuba an unfair reputation for employing repression to counter the virus." (Mutti)

The newspaper *Granma* explained Cuba's reasons for using quarantine: "The main usefulness of this measure is to slow down as much as possible the epidemic progression of the disease to allow time for other measures of disease control to have a medium- or long-term effect, such as education (encouraging changes in sexual habits and behavior), until such time as a vaccine and treatment exist, auguring a definitive solution to the problem." ("Cuban Strategy")

When asked about the Cuban approach to AIDS, then - Cuban Deputy Public Health Minister Hector Terry explained in October 1987, "The quarantine center is a sanatorium. We have a very small number of people carrying the virus, and we believe that because of that, we are in a unique situation. We have an opportunity, in epidemiological terms, of controlling the spread of AIDS and preventing it from becoming a major epidemic as it has in other countries, where they don't know how to confront, reduce or eliminate it.

WW Photo

Pictured: Right: The late Bobbi Campbell, center Leslie Feinberg at first national AIDS protest march in Washington, D.C., Oct. 8, 1983.

"We are in a situation that permits us to make this kind of decision, and to wait a while because we are not talking about something permanent, for a whole lifetime. We're talking about a dialectical situation."

Terry added, "This aspect [quarantine] is controversial, some groups of scientists disagree with it." He said that the objections were "more from a political than a scientific standpoint. But we believe our country has this epidemiological opportunity and we shouldn't lose it. We are trying to prevent the spread of the virus throughout the country by means of sexual relations that our patients could have with other people who at this point have not been infected with the virus.

"Our country has its own philosophy and the first principle of this philosophy is respect for human dignity. I think that human dignity requires care of the individual. You know that we spare no resources here to make sure that our people have the best health care possible anywhere in the world. And that's part of what we're trying to maintain in our battle against AIDS." (Wald, 1987)

The best care – for free

Cuba provided free health care to its population despite economic obstruction by the U.S. and later the devastating loss of its main trading partner, the Soviet Union. Cuba organized its scarce resources – not just to stem transmission of the epidemic, but to provide humane care.

"Organized like small communities," *MEDICC Review* editors wrote in 2001, "the sanatoriums are made up of apartment complexes and small houses, plus infirmary, offices and other patient facilities." ("Cuba's HIV-AIDS Rate")

People with AIDS received healthy food, medications and other treatment, air-conditioned housing, exercise and sports, movies, television, videos, rest, and psychological and social services; everything was free except cigarettes.

Cubans with AIDS continued to receive their full paychecks, even if they weren't able to work. Their jobs were held open indefinitely. Terry stressed, "This is very important, so that they have no concern regarding the support of their families.

"What other country in the world would be capable of paying full salary to people with AIDS?" Terry asked. "I think that's very linked to the whole question of human rights and the controversies around this. We know there are countries that shout about human rights, such as the U.S. where a person who gets AIDS may die of hunger, lose his job, it's hard to get into a hospital. Treatment there costs an average of $700 a day."

Terry added that the Cubans' families also received special attention. A working group of psychologists, sociologists and social workers helped the families of people with AIDS deal with their problems, as well. Terry concluded that people with AIDS had greater peace of mind knowing their families were being cared for.

Cuba brought science, not scapegoating, to AIDS care

Cuba tried to isolate the spread of AIDS as soon as the epidemic appeared in the island population, explained then-Cuban Deputy Public Health Minister Hector Terry in 1987. But Cuba did not try to socially isolate people with AIDS.

Terry stressed of Cubans living in the sanatoria, "They visit their families at home, go out on pass; their families visit them, every day. Their friends can visit them." (Wald)

Cuba attempted to quarantine the spread of the epidemic based on a scientific approach to a medical emergency, without using scapegoating to isolate people with AIDS.

In the U.S., AIDS activists had to fight a protracted battle to replace the bigoted label of "high-risk groups" with a rational understanding of "high-risk behaviors." Cuban medical workers and educators approached transmission scientifically.

Arguelles and Rich observed in the autumn of 1987 that, "Cuba is unusual in publicizing the disease, not as a gay disease, but rather as a sexually transmitted disease regardless of specific sexual practice."

The primary route of AIDS transmission in Cuba was via international contact, including Cubans who had worked or studied abroad.

Of the first 99 people quarantined in 1986, only about 20 percent were believed to have contracted AIDS through same-sex contact.

Terry articulated this clearly: "We are carrying out our program by giving the public a lot of scientific information, speaking to them clearly about the modes of transmission and not generating phenomena such as homophobia or sexual repression.

"In some countries the mass media, for commercial reasons, generate those phenomena to sell more magazines or newspapers. But we don't need to sell more magazines or newspapers. We don't need to use AIDS to get people to watch more TV or to get some corporation to finance AIDS research. We don't need any of that here."

Terry summed up, "We start from the ideas that AIDS is transmitted not because of what you are but because of what you do, and therefore there's no reason to generate any kind of persecution or phobia against any patient."

Interviewer Karen Wald added, "Members of the gay community interviewed here said there has been no increase in homophobia or attacks on gays as a result of AIDS. They attribute this in part to the fact that the government has not singled out gays as carriers of the disease."

Eyewitness to Cuban care

Cleo Manago was part of a delegation of 200 people from the U.S. who challenged Washington's travel ban to visit Cuba in August 1994. Manago wrote about his visit to an AIDS sanatorium in an article entitled "Cuba, from a Black, Male, Same-Gender-Loving Perspective."

"The widely reported rumors and articles on AIDS concentration camps in Cuba are out of context and pure anti-Cuba propaganda," Manago stated. "I visited Cuba's largest AIDS sanatorium and was taken aback by the humane, considerate, intuitive and life affirming approach to care taken by this center.

"The sanatorium was similar to a large housing complex where all who chose to live there had 24-hour health care, the option of having family members, even a dog or a cat stay with them. Same-gender-loving and heterosexual couples living together at the complex is a common occurrence.

"I asked people living there about the conditions in which they live. None were happy about having HIV or AIDS but all were very appreciative of the care they received. Many who could go home if they wanted chose to stay where they were guaranteed prepared food, a comfortable home and prompt medical attention. This particular center offered ambulatory care for those with jobs or who wanted to continue with school. To my knowledge there is nothing similar in the U.S.A."

Manago concluded, "The main problem people with AIDS faced was the difficulty in getting the medicines and treatments (pentamidine, bactrim, condoms, etc.) needed from other countries, due to the U.S. blockade of Cuba." (Manago)

'Information without sensationalism'

Dr. Hector Terry emphasized in 1987, "We are treating the patients medically to maintain their present state of good health. Every time some new information comes up in the scientific community, some new kind of drug or medicine, we try to find out if it could be useful in preventing the virus from becoming activated into a full-blown disease."

Terry added, "Information is reaching the public without any sensationalism, without creating any hysteria or panic. We haven't yet been using the mass media as much as we should; we think that's a deficiency in the program. We've been using state agencies and all the ministries a lot, organizing conferences for all the workers in certain ministries, especially those in the high-risk areas. We also utilize the health education program and the popular video centers throughout the country. We run videos and have doctors there to answer questions. We've used that a lot and many young people attend these.

"We're now preparing other activities with the mass organizations, the Committees to Defend the Revolution, student and women's organizations," he con-

Walter Lippmann

Billboards aren't used to sell products in Cuba, but to bring important education to all – like this AIDS awareness sign.

tinued. "We are working with other scientific institutions in the country, which are providing invaluable assistance and we are looking at all possibilities anywhere in the world. We try to synthesize what is being done internationally.

"Here we have the SUMA group, which is developing Cuban technology to do mass-scale diagnostic testing. With an infinitesimal blood sample we can diagnose for AIDS. We'll be trying to get this equipment into all the country's blood banks next year, and in all the hygiene and epidemiology centers. And we'll be preparing ourselves for carrying out at least annual blood tests of the whole population, in every blood bank and epidemiology center, in every hospital. We're preparing a very wide-range program."

Terry concluded, "I repeat that the method of quarantine in a sanatorium isn't permanent. It will be treated dialectically. We are studying the situation and when we see that it is not the correct solution, or that other possibilities offer themselves, we will act accordingly – always basing ourselves on scientific data. Otherwise we wouldn't be scientists."

Clearly quarantine in Cuba was a tactic at the moment the epidemic emerged, not a scientific principle.

Joseph Mutti wrote from Havana in June 1999, "The government undertook extensive efforts to learn more about transmission of the virus and to discover a

cure. It wasn't until the early 1990s that officials felt enough was known to end the quarantine and focus on public information, education and prevention."

Cuba began an out-patient pilot reintegration project in 1993 that proved successful. (Aguilera)

Those who left the sanatoria received ambulatory care that included regular doctor's care, visits to specialists and dietary supplements – all free. (medicc.org)

However, the *Denver Post* concluded in February 2003, "Today, 48 percent of those who are HIV-positive or have AIDS choose to live in the 16 sanatoriums around Cuba." (Aguilera) ▼

U.S. imperialist blockade obstructed Cuban AIDS treatment

The Cuban approach to AIDS saved lives, Joseph Mutti stated in June 1999. "Cuba now has one of the world's lowest rates of infection, with only one of every 1,500 persons testing HIV-positive (the U.S. rate is 1 of every 550). That statistic is especially remarkable given Cuba's sexually active youth and easygoing attitudes about sex." *MEDICC Review* editors explained that, "By the end of 2001, Cuba will have approved its most ambitious offensive yet against HIV/AIDS: setting up a National Task Force Against AIDS (GOPELS)," to be headed by the minister of public health and the secretary of the council of ministers.

"Their job will be to integrate prevention strategies among the various national players, including the Public Health and Education Ministries, the Federation of Cuban Women, and other government agencies and NGOs. They will be guided by the 'Strategic Plan for Controlling HIV/AIDS,' outlining national strategies against the virus for the next five years." ("Cuba's Strategy")

The biggest problem in dealing with AIDS on the island continued to be access to medicine for free distribution to the population because of the U.S. blockade.

MEDICC Review noted in 2001 that, "Early treatment of AIDS consisted of AZT, interferons and other drugs commonly used in international protocols—but often more difficult for Cuba to purchase because many were patented by U.S. pharmaceutical companies and therefore not freely available to Cuban importers under the restrictions imposed by the U.S. embargo.

"Earlier this year, Cuba began to manufacture its own anti-retrovirals and make them available to AIDS patients free of charge. Cuba has maintained a strong research component in the fight against AIDS, primarily through studies of the application of interferons to AIDS patients and the continued research to develop an HIV/AIDS vaccine."

In February 2003, treatment of Cubans with AIDS had greatly improved over the past two years because Cuba's pharmaceutical industry was producing its own generic copies of anti-HIV medicines. Dr. Byron Barksdale, director of a U.S. medical group, said, "Cuba now produces enough anti-viral medicines for its own patients and it has offered to supply other nations in the Caribbean region." (Cookson)

The *Financial Times* – no friend to socialist construction – reported, "Cuba has much to teach the world about tackling AIDS, the American Association for the Advancement of Science heard on [Feb. 16, 2003]. A wide-ranging prevention and

treatment program, backed by strong political action, has given the Caribbean country the lowest prevalence of AIDS disease and HIV infection in the western hemisphere – and one of the lowest rates in the world." (Cookson)

Cuba addresses world impact

In its issue coinciding with International AIDS Day 2001, *MEDICC* Review noted, "Today, some 36 million people worldwide are infected with HIV, over 25 million of them in Africa, where most have no way to pay for the drugs that might extend their lives. They die with no treatment in sight." ("Cuba's HIV-AIDS Rate")

MEDICC Review reprinted the full text of a speech by Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage Dávila, delivered earlier that year at the United Nations General Assembly on AIDS. Lage Dávila had offered his socialist government's solidarity for people with AIDS, "especially those in the developing countries most affected."

In his speech on June 25, 2001, Lage Dávila said, "No country is free of AIDS. Some – the privileged and rich – have managed to reduce the mortality rate with medicines sold at high, unreasonable prices. Others – unfortunate and poor – are experiencing a terrifying reduction in their population's life expectancy and a demographic decline that could lead them to extinction."

He stressed that, "In many African nations, the number of teachers who die from AIDS each year is greater than the number of new teachers graduating. The deaths in sub-Saharan Africa to date are equivalent to those that would have resulted from dropping on the region 70 bombs like the ones on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It is a dramatic paradox that, in this new millennium, the same continent that witnessed the appearance of humankind's first ancestors six million years ago begins to witness the disappearance of humankind.

"Cuba also suffers from this disease; there have been 2,565 people living with HIV/AIDS in our country, 388 of whom currently have the full-blown disease, and 896 of whom have died over the last 14 years.

"Our program to fight AIDS," Lage Dávila explained, "guarantees comprehensive care for people with HIV and AIDS, free anti-retroviral treatment for all, specialized medical centers for those who require them and a constant struggle for patients to achieve the fullest social integration, with all their rights and without discrimination.

"It also guarantees access to safe blood, certifying that 100 percent of blood donations are free of AIDS, hepatitis and other illnesses; voluntary testing of all pregnant women, resulting in zero mother-child transmission since 1997; and an education and prevention strategy aimed at vulnerable groups, young people and the entire population. We have the lowest AIDS rate in the Americas and one of the lowest in the world, with 0.3 percent of the population between 15 and 49 years affected.

"Even in the face of the [U.S.] blockade, which prevents our access to 50 percent of the world's new medicines because they are produced in the United States," Lage Dávila stressed, "we have controlled the epidemic, and what is more, achieved a life expectancy of 76 years and an infant mortality rate of less than seven. Cuban participates in this Assembly as a responsible member of the international community, showing solidarity and modesty and freely offering our experience and collaboration."

Solidarity proposal

Lage Dávila stated, "The U.N. Secretary General has proposed – and is making a worthy and just effort to obtain – $7 to $10 billion for the fight against AIDS. The amount is not enough and money alone cannot solve the problem, but it is a necessary start. It is incomprehensible to think that this life-saving money cannot be found in a world that spends 40 times more on illegal drugs, 80 times more on military budgets and 100 times more on advertising.

"It is incomprehensible to think that this life-saving money cannot be found in a world where 20 percent of the population is responsible for 86 percent of private consumption, and where the personal fortunes of 22 people each exceed the amount the Secretary General is requesting, fortunes that in total represent 43 times his request."

Lage Dávila pointed to the U.S.: "The richest and most powerful nation in history – that claims it is a human rights champion, does not make its payments to the U.N. and is trying to reduce its contribution to the WHO [World Health Organization] – dedicates barely 0.2 percent of its gross domestic product to development. It is the only country that voted against the resolution giving every individual the right to have access to AIDS medicines, while at the same time, it has unleashed an insane arms race upon the world, with the sale of the most sophisticated instruments of war to allies and followers, and its global missile shield initiative.

"There is no need to elaborate further to understand that the international economic order is criminally unjust, that when the words 'democracy,' 'human rights,' 'individual liberty,' 'equal opportunities' and others come from the mouths of the powerful, they ring hollow and demagogic."

Lage Dávila delivered Cuba's urging that the special session of the U.N. General Assembly proclaim that:

"AIDS drugs and other vital medicines required on a large scale should not be protected by patents. People cannot be allowed to make money off the lives of human beings.

"The foreign debt of the poorest countries should be cancelled immediately and unconditionally. They have already paid more than once.

"The next Group of Seven meeting, instead of adopting a new economic liberalization to impose on the world's poor and less fortunate, should agree to reduce their military budgets to raise at least U.S. $10 billion requested by the U.N. And they should turn these funds over today, not sit by while 25 million more people die. This is merely a small part of their social debt to the Third World."

Cuban government offer

Lage Dávila concluded with an offer from the Cuban government to the poorest countries and those with the highest prevalence of the illness:

- Four thousand doctors and health personnel to create the necessary infrastructure to supply the population with the prescription drugs and necessary follow-up and to train a large number of specialists in their own fields, including nurses and allied health technicians.
- Sufficient professors to establish 20 medical schools, many of whom could be chosen out of the 2,359 Cuban doctors who were then serving in 17 countries as part of Cuba's Integral Health Program. These schools could train 1,000 doctors annually in countries that need the most assistance.
- Doctors, teachers, psychologists and other specialists needed to assess and collaborate with campaigns to prevent AIDS and other illnesses.
- Diagnostic equipment and kits necessary for basic prevention programs.
- Anti-retroviral treatment for 30,000 patients.

Lage Dávila concluded, "All it would take is for the international community to provide the raw materials for the medicines, the equipment and material resources for these products and services. Cuba would not obtain any profits, and would pay salaries in its national currency, thus taking on the most expensive part for international health agencies, as well as the most difficult part, which is to ensure that the professionals are prepared and ready to begin their work."

The U.S.-led political and economic blockade of Cuba kept this offer of socialist solidarity from reaching those around the world who most needed it.

Cuba and homosexuality

Change apparent in still photos and motion pictures

In 1987, two years into the AIDS epidemic and on the eve of the overturning of the Soviet Union – Cuba's primary trading partner – and the East European bloc of workers' states, the Cuban Revolution continued to make great gains in the battle against old, obstinate prejudice against same-sex love.

Qualitative developments of great import took place in Cuba in the late 1980s.

Hechavarría and Hatch wrote that in 1987, the police were "forbidden to harass people because of appearance or clothing, largely benefiting gays."

A year later, another important change in Cuban law occurred. Pre-revolutionary legislation against "flaunting homosexuality" in public was rescinded. That edict had threatened feminine males and masculine females of all sexualities since its imposition under U.S. neo-colonial rule in the 1930s.

Punishment for homosexual acts had already been formally removed from Cuban law, back in 1979 – almost a quarter of a century before the U.S. decriminalized same-sex love.

Arguelles and Rich noted, though, that the 1979 legal code had "failed to legalize manifestations of homosexual behavior in the public sphere and left intact anti-gay laws dating to the Cuban Social Defense Code of 1939."

Arguelles and Rich, summarizing their research in Cuba in the mid-1980s, made a very important point about the difference between private and public spheres in a society building socialism that might not be readily apparent to anyone living in a capitalist system.

They explained, "As delineated in a Latin American socialist setting, private space is far wider than in the United States, encompassing virtually all behavior outside the purview of official sanction or attention, while approved policy, published texts, and official stances compose the public sphere."

They added that "within the private sphere, there are a clear latitude and range of possibilities for lesbians and gay men that surprise the critical observer."

Canadian activist Ian Lumsden quoted a gay émigré living in Toronto, who stated in regard to gay men that "homosexuals in Cuba find it much easier to be open and free about conveying sexual desire in the street than they would in Canada."

In 1988 Cuba took another major step by striking down the imperialist-era "Public Ostentation Law" against "public scandal" or "extravagance."

Revolutionary leadership, mass participation

Cuban society was not changing in some automatic, unconscious way. These developments – which are both a reflection of the growth of consciousness and an effort to raise wider, deeper consciousness – were the result of revolutionary leadership, with widespread popular discussion and debate.

In 1986, Fidel Castro and the Cuban Communist Party had initiated a popular campaign, "not simply to rectify errors committed in the last 10 years," the Cuban president emphasized, "or errors committed throughout the history of the revolution. Rectification is finding the way to resolve errors that are hundreds of years old." (Hillson)

That same year, Cuba's National Commission on Sex Education stated that homosexuality is a sexual orientation and announced the goal of countering homophobia with education. (From the film "Gay Cuba")

In 1988, Fidel Castro spoke out publicly about the need to change negative attitudes in society and in the party about homosexuality. (Hatch)

At the 1992 congress of the Union of Young Communists, Cuban revolutionary leader Vilma Espín, president of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), challenged prejudicial ideas about homosexuality presented by a psychologist. (Hatch)

Sonia de Vries, director of the film "Gay Cuba," reported that Espín stated that what needed changing was prejudice, not gay and lesbian sexuality. (Hillson)

That same year, Fidel Castro stated in an interview: "I am absolutely opposed to any form of repression, contempt, scorn or discrimination with regard to homosexuals. [It is] a natural human tendency that must simply be respected." (Borge)

These qualitative changes in Cuba, like still photographs, capture the peaks of progress.

The release of three films in the 1990s – "Strawberry and Chocolate," "Gay Cuba" and "Butterflies on the Scaffold" – offered a moving picture of the sweep of progress resulting from decades of the process of building socialism despite the imperialist military, economic and political blockade.

From the balcony to the screen

When Havana was ruled by U.S. crime bosses and bankers, capitalism made room in the market for homosexual acts, forced to serve the fantasies of those who could afford the cost in dollars and pesos. Often the elite who paid for sex despised those who they exploited – hating them for their class, their race, their sex and/or their gender expression and for witnessing the cruelty, self-hatred, guilt and shame in patrician desire.

So there were lots of homosexual acts taking place in Havana – the biggest U.S. brothel industry in the Caribbean. But off the clock there was not much social

room for two men or two women of any gender expression to meet and get to know each other, to freely follow same-sex attraction and exploration, or to fall in love and/or live together as couples or in other formations.

Many men found each other in the darkened theaters of old Cuban cinemas like the Campoamor, Rialto and Verdun. One older Cuban homosexual recalled, "[Y]ou could go and immediately pick up a young guy. Many had their first experience there. There was a lot of sex in those cinemas." (Lumsden)

The culture of Cuba changed with social ownership of the means of production on the island – the land, mines, factories and other major arteries of economic life.

The Cuban Revolution did not, and could not, wave a magic wand and instantly transform the social content of culture. But it quickly transformed the economic character of culture. Like everything else that is collectively produced on the island, culture began to be produced to meet the social needs of the many, not just packaged for individual consumption for the few.

Lumsden reported the ways in which he saw culture being made available to everyone in Cuba in 1996. "This is evident in the low prices and range of theater, dance and music that are available on stage or in open spaces like the Parque Central in Old Havana. It is evident in the quantity and quality of translated foreign and domestic books that have been published at low prices in huge editions. Finally it is evident in events such as the annual film festival (New Latin American Cinema), which has an impact as great as Toronto's Festival."

Lumsden observed, "When you attend a cultural event in Havana you come away as impressed by the informed and critical engagement of the audience as you are by the innovative quality of the performance itself. This involvement is far removed from the commodified nature of so many mainstream cultural events in North America."

This is the Cuban audience to which the state sponsored the release of the 1993 blockbuster movie "Strawberry and Chocolate." The film, about an attempt at friendship and understanding between a young heterosexual communist and a male homosexual intellectual brought same-sex love out of the cinema balconies, where shame and guilt lurked in the shadows, and onto the silver screen of Cuban culture.

Over the next two years, two important documentaries followed – "Gay Cuba" and "Butterflies on the Scaffold."

All told, these movies offer a view of the influence of revolutionary process on popular culture, as well as the influence of popular culture on revolutionary development. The films are themselves part of that dialectical struggle, which itself takes place within the battle against ruling imperialist ideology, broadcast at every turn by its entertainment, media and education industries.

'Strawberry & Chocolate': the sweet taste of change

In 1993, the Cuban state sponsored a ground-breaking movie, "Strawberry and Chocolate" (Fresa y chocolate).

The movie tells the story of two young Cuban men – a heterosexual communist and a homosexual. In his 1995 Cineaste article, Dennis West described the movie as about two young men getting to know each other in Havana in 1979. David is the young communist. Diego, the homosexual, West writes, "leaves in spite of his pro-Revolution sympathies and his friend's claim that there is a place for gays in the Cuban Revolution." (West)

The release of "Strawberry and Chocolate" in Cuba broke national box office records and opened up an island-wide discussion about same-sex love and prejudice.

The movie's script is an adaptation by author Senel Paz of his own very popular short story, "The Wolf, the Woods and the New Man."

Dennis West interviewed acclaimed Cuban director Tomás Gutiérrez Alea – affectionately known to friends as "Titón" but also referred to as Alea – in August 1994. Gutiérrez died, at age 68, in April 1996. West conducted the interview in Juarez, Mexico, during the Second Festival of Latinamerican Cinema Paso del Norte; Dennis West and Joan M. West translated the interview into English, edited it and published it in the Winter-Spring 1995 edition of *Cineaste*.

The movie, which played simultaneously at 10 to 12 Havana theaters, drew lines of Cubans that stretched for blocks. (Oberg)

When West asked Gutiérrez why he thought his movie "Strawberry and Chocolate" so resonated in Cuba, the filmmaker answered that as soon as the movie opened after the annual film festival, "There were very long lines to see it, and it ran for something like three months in Havana. I think it had that response because it was a well-told story with a theme that many people wanted to discuss in public. A theme that up until this time had remained rather marginalized. I'm not referring just to the theme of homosexuality, but rather to the theme of intolerance in general. I think that people really felt a great need to reflect on this, and to reflect on it openly. For these reasons, the film became a sociological phenomenon."

When asked about the number of Cuban viewers who attended screenings, Gutiérrez said, "'Strawberry and Chocolate' may hold the record for the greatest number of Cuban viewers. I don't know. But at any rate, it is the film which has attracted the greatest number of viewers in the shortest period of time."

Gutiérrez contrasted 1979, the year in which "Strawberry and Chocolate" is set, with life on the island in 1995: "Now there is greater flexibility in job opportunities for homosexuals. In the case of representing Cuba abroad, for example, the appointment of representatives used to be handled with kid gloves when homosexuals were involved. Many people were against appointing them because they were considered more vulnerable to scandal and blackmail – and that's true, we've seen it in countries such as England and the United States – but things are very different nowadays for homosexuals."

Gutiérrez summed up, "Many Cuban homosexuals are now open about their sexual orientation. Others are not open about it – just like anywhere else – but there is a new level of awareness concerning homosexuality."

Gutiérrez recalled the experience of his friend Aramis, who told him in Havana in 1994 about an argument with his father. Aramis said when he returned home for a visit with shoulder-length hair, his father used an anti-gay slur and ordered his son to get a haircut or leave.

Gutiérrez said Aramis argued with his father, saying, "You're supposed to be a communist, for freedom, for human beings. I'm your son, you should love me, whether or not I'm a homosexual. What kind of communist are you?"

Gutiérrez said by the time Aramis had stormed to the door, his father stopped him with these words: "Wait. You're right. You can stay. You don't have to cut your hair. I've got to think about these things." Aramis added, "So we hugged, and I stayed."

'The trajectory of Cuban cinema'

Julia Levin, a Latvian freelance film critic who lives in the U.S., described Gutiérrez Alea as the most famous director in Cuba. She noted that the filmmaker was born to a bourgeois family in 1928. After getting a law degree from the University of Havana, he studied film at "the Centro Sperimentale della Cinematographia in Rome (which had spawned, amongst others, Michelangelo Antonioni), where he fell in love with cinema and where he directed his first neorealist film, El Mégano (1954), with Julio Garcia Espinosa, another filmmaker he met at Centro Sperimentale."

Levin continued, "It has been noted that this film marked the very beginning of the New Latin American Cinema, the 'new wave' in cinema that grew out of the desire by many Latin American filmmakers to unveil the conflicting realities of their own countries and to do this by exploring the political potential of the filmic medium.

"Alea was one of the founders of the Instituto Cubano del Arte y la Industria Cinematográficos (ICAIC)," Levin wrote, "which was created in 1959 in order to vigorously produce and promote cinema as the most progressive vehicle for com-

municating the ideas of the revolutionary through, for the most part, documentaries, although some fiction films were made there as well.

"The ICAIC recognized film as the most powerful and important art form in modern life, a voice of the state, and, unquestionably, the most accessible form of distributing revolutionary ideas to the masses. In its first 24 years, ICAIC produced nearly 900 documentaries and over 112 feature films."

Levin pointed out, "Artistically and intellectually, the trajectory of Cuban cinema–from cinéma vérité to experimentalism, and from neorealist drama to social comedy–has paralleled the trajectory of Alea's directorial career. Similarly, Alea's films are a primary source of cultural politics in revolutionary Cuba, a fact that allows one to study his films directly against the political climate in which he lived and worked."

Dennis West added that "Tomas Gutiérrez Alea has been the most prominent of the filmmakers working in Cuba's government-supported film institute, the Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematograficos (ICAIC). Gutiérrez Alea is a committed revolutionary, and his best features explore the social, political and historical dimensions of the revolutionary progress."

Solidarity served up with a cherry on top

After Cuba lost the socialist solidarity and trade it had had with the Soviet Union, the illegal U.S. blockade tightened its grip on the island's economy.

West pointed out in 1995, "Given the profound economic crisis currently gripping Cuba, it is astonishing that a feature such as 'Strawberry and Chocolate' could be produced. The situation in ICAIC is desperate. Top directors such as Gutiérrez Alea earn the approximate equivalent of $5.00 per month, and the once relatively well-funded ICAIC filmmakers can now undertake a feature only if co-production money is available. The low-budget 'Strawberry and Chocolate,' for instance, could not have been produced without Mexican and Spanish support."

Gutiérrez Alea, battling cancer, also had to undergo surgery during the production of the film. Juan Carlos Tabio, a collaborator, stepped up to co-direct the film.

"Strawberry and Chocolate" was the first Cuban movie to be nominated for an Oscar in the Best Foreign Film category. (Levin)

West concluded: "The commercial release of 'Strawberry and Chocolate' in the U.S. is a welcome event because U.S. authorities have at times hounded Gutiérrez Alea – by, for example, denying his visa requests or blocking exhibitions of his works. This interviewer's videotape copy of [Gutiérrez's 1968 film] 'Memories of Underdevelopment' was confiscated by U.S. Customs in Los Angeles when he entered the country on Dec. 11, 1993, after having legally attended the annual International Festival of New Latin American Cinema in Havana." By the closing ceremo-

ny of that festival in Havana on Dec. 10, 1993, "Strawberry and Chocolate" had won most of the top awards.

"Afterwards" – West, who was a guest, described – "in the Palace of the Revolution, Fidel Castro held a reception for festival guests featuring strawberry and chocolate ice cream served together for dessert."

'Gay Cuba'

Two Cuban-backed documentaries about changing attitudes on the island towards same-sex love and gender variance – which in turn deepened that change – opened in theaters on the island in the mid-1990s.

"Gay Cuba" released in 1996 was a project of Cuba's Félix Varela Center (CFV). Activist Sonja de Vries – raised in Amsterdam and now living and organizing in Kentucky – wrote and directed the documentary, which objectively struck a blow against the political blockade of Cuba by U.S. imperialism.

"Gay Cuba" is a series of interviews – a radio host and a singer/poet, an artist and a gay male elected union general secretary, a feminine male factory worker and a journalist, an HIV-positive doctor and an interpreter, soldiers and teenaged law students – who offer personal anecdotes and individual observations about attitudes towards same-sex love in Cuba.

The interviews are interspersed with archival footage of the revolutionary seizure of power. The sound track incorporates the music of world-renowned Cuban musicians Pablo Milanés and Silvio Rodríguez.

The Cuban Women's Federation (FMC) hosted the opening screening of the documentary in Havana in 1994. The same year, the FMC invited an organization named "U.S. Queers for Cuba" to visit the island, the group's co-founder de Vries told Workers World.

"'Gay Cuba' was shown at the Havana International Festival of Latin American Cinema to public and critical acclaim," wrote scholar Larry R. Oberg.

The documentary turned its cameras onto the audiences of "Strawberry and Chocolate" (Fresa y chocolate), another film made with the help of the Cuban state. "Gay Cuba" captured some of the enthusiastic responses of Cubans who had just seen "Strawberry and Chocolate"—a 1993 film about a heterosexual communist and a homosexual Cuban – at the Yara cinema.

"Fantastic!" a filmgoer who described himself as a heterosexual, masculine male exclaimed. "If I could have a friend like that I would!"

Jorge Perugorria, a lead actor in "Strawberry and Chocolate," said in this documentary: "'Strawberry and Chocolate' is the story of an encounter … between a communist militant and a homosexual, and how their friendship develops out of this encounter. What happened with the film is that it surpassed the cinematographic phenomena, and became a social phenomenon. People had never before discussed homosexuality so much."

Cuban journalist Gisela Arandia stressed in "Gay Cuba," "For people in other parts of the world, 'Strawberry and Chocolate' might be just another movie. For Cuba, it was an essential moment in our society's development, because never before had these topics been dealt with in public."

Measure of change

"Gay Cuba" was a weather vane that pointed in the direction of prevailing winds of change in the revolutionary battle against the legacy of centuries of colonialist and imperialist cultural domination.

These documentary interviews offered a cross-section of consciousness.

"They're people, one should treat them normally, but keep them away," one youth with her friends told the interviewer.

"They are part of our Cuban-ness, part of our people, we have to accept them as such," said an older man.

One young woman recalled going to a judgmental therapist about her attraction to other women. "I stood up, but first told him that he was mediocre and a bad psychologist and that I regretted being there. Then I stood up and left."

Another young woman remembered going to see a psychologist to try to change her same-sex attraction. "At the end of the week, she told me, 'Look, love, I see that you are happy as you are. Don't try to change. It's nothing out of this world. Nothing bad.'"

A cross-dressing factory worker explained, "Besides working here I am an artist. I imitate Sarita Montiel. I'm a drag queen. Everyone calls me 'Sarita.' My relationship with the workers here in the factory is wonderful. I've been here 12 years."

One young Cuban said when she was in high school, she thought that she was not accepted into the communist youth (UJC) group because there was discussion about whether she was or was not a lesbian.

Another Cuban emphasized, "I've read the statutes of the UJC, and I don't remember reading any article that said that being homosexual is an obstacle to being a member of the UJC. There are thousands of homosexuals in the UJC, from the roots to the leadership."

Lourdes Flores, from Cuba's National Center for Sex Education (Cenesex), stated in her interview, "As a center we see homosexuality as a sexual orientation, just like heterosexuality or bisexuality." She added, "We have led workshops on the topic of homosexuality; sexuality in general, homosexuality in particular. The workshops are very interesting. For example, we have workshops with teachers, doctors, the general population, community activists and youth."

"Gay Cuba" showed viewers a transgender performance organized by a neighborhood Committee for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR).

Cuban youth of all sexualities from Federation of University Students (FEU), Havana, March 1993. Still photo from the ground-breaking documentary 'Gay Cuba.'

Sonja de Vries

'Break the blockade!'

The political views towards the revolution of those who spoke on camera in "Gay Cuba" largely could only be gleaned through their anecdotes. The individual experiences narrated in this documentary were positive and negative, in varying degrees.

Progress in Cuba is the measurable difference between the two.

It is painful to hear Llane Alexis Dominguez say onscreen that when his father found out he was homosexual, "He actually said he'd like to beat me to death!" In Cuba, however, men who have sex with men and women who have sex with women are not being tortured and lashed to fences to die, beaten to death, stabbed or shot or strangled, decapitated and dismembered – all too frequent occurrences in the U.S.

A gay male Cuban worker sums up that in Cuba in 1994 what was largely left to deal with were individual attitudes. "I don't think that Cuba's situation is as critical for gay people as it is in other countries," he explained. "I have the opportunity to study and to work here and no one can stop me. They might try to, but it's that individual, not the system itself."

He called on the gay community in the U.S. to help break the blockade, which, de Vries pointed out in her 1994 documentary commentary, "has cost the Cuban economy over $40 billion since 1960; the resulting fuel shortages and scarcity of food and medicine have impacted all Cubans."

Precious footage

The documentary also provides historic footage of Cuban *nova trova* singer Pablo Milanés singing his song "Original Sin" at a 1994 public concert in Havana. ("El Pecado Original" is available on Milanés's CD "Orígines.")

Milanés – a Cuban who harvested in the UMAP brigades in the mid-1960s, and who is beloved in Cuba – told the concert audience, "I dedicate this song to

homosexuals, to gay people, and to all those who are marginalized and are suffering in the world."

Milanés sang: "Two souls, two bodies, two men who love each other, are being expelled from the paradise they live in. Neither of them is a warrior with victories to boast of. Neither of them has riches, to calm the ire of their judges. Neither is a president, neither is a censor of his own desires. We are not god. Let's not make the same mistakes again."

Larry Oberg noted, "Introduced at his annual holiday concert held in the vast Karl Marx Theater in the Miramar neighborhood of Havana, 'El Pecado Original' took the audience and the country by storm and did much to advance the cause of gay acceptance."

"Gay Cuba" includes footage documenting crossed-dressed homosexual Cubans participating in the annual, massive May Day march in 1995. Two lesbian and gay delegations were also invited from the U.S. to take part the same year. There's also footage of a lesbian and gay Cuban contingent in the José Martí procession.

At the close of "Gay Cuba," radio host Anna María Ramos concluded, "We have been in 35 years of revolution, a revolution that by no means has been static; that has made changes constantly. In every sense, we are prepared for change. The roots of homophobia have not been driven so deep into the soil of Cuban earth. They can be pulled out."

La Güinera, Cuba

Cross-gender performance in workers' dining halls

'Butterflies on the Scaffold" ("*Mariposas en el andamio*"), a 1995 documentary, offered a profoundly moving account of how Cuban women construction workers literally made room for cross-dressing performance art in the workers' cafeterias in their neighborhood on the outskirts of Havana, called La Güinera. The film was directed by Margaret Gilpin and Luis Felipe Bernaza.

Gilpin reported that the preliminary cut had to be shown 11 times at the Havana Film Festival in December 1995 to accommodate the crowds. In April 1996, the film won the best documentary and the popularity award at the lesbian and gay film festival in Turin.

The word "butterfly" ("mariposa") refers to male-bodied Cubans whose femininity is either a part or the whole of their gender expression. "Butterflies on the Scaffold" came out at the same time that a contingent of homosexual and gender-variant Cubans danced at the head of the massive May Day march in Havana that year. Two U.S. queer-focused activist delegations were invited to join in the procession – one from Bay Area Queers for Cuba, the other from New York's Center for Cuban Studies. (Hatch and DeVries)

Cuban women – "the revolution within the revolution" – made up 70 percent of the construction brigades that built La Güinera from the ground up.

For more than 15 years after the 1959 revolution, La Güinera remained undeveloped. The land was in the shadow of a meat factory, surrounded by bushes and insects.

Documentary footage explained that in the beginning, before government planning helped develop the community, "Squatters came from the provinces and formed an association. They said, we'll build your house today and mine tomorrow."

A local family doctor said to the interviewer, with pride, that by the time of this documentary, the local infant mortality rate in the neighborhood clinic. had dropped to two.

'We saw the show and we like it'

Marisela, a young woman of African descent on the construction staff, recalled that cross-dressing performance artists "had a show in a private house. They invited the girls from the [workers'] dining room. We went, we saw the group, the show, and we liked it."

One drag artist spoke from his home, the site of performances, explaining the early days of the shows. "We used sheets for fabric, no sequins, nothing. The dress-

ing room was in the bedroom and we acted here. When the show moved to the backyard we used this as our dressing room. We had more room and air for us and for the public. The public brought their own chairs. Marisela even brought a sofa! In the short time we worked in my backyard this was the headquarters, the cradle of cross-dressing in Havana. Hundreds of drag queens came though here who never thought they would do this work."

The local security chief, on camera with his young daughter, expressed a backward view: "Personally, I don't think these things should increase. On the contrary, I think they should diminish. Children go there and see a person who is a man in normal life or who goes around as a man and later they see him dressed as a woman, that child will want to experiment and that's not what I want to see.

"Also, they charged admission for the parties they gave at home." A performer noted that the funds at one event were collected for the troops of the territorial militia – for the defense of Cuba.

The security police chief called off the drag shows. But that was not the end of the story.

Marisela explained, "After the police stopped the parties there was no place for them to perform. In solidarity I began to collect protest letters and petitions. The only option was Fifi. To bring them here so everyone could see them. I was convinced they were good."

Marisela was referring to the lead organizer of La Güinera's construction brigades – Josefina Bocourt Díaz, affectionately known as "Fifi."

'Fifi should be honored by us'

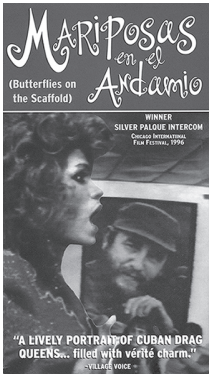
The woman whom co-workers and neighbors call "Fifi" is a Cuban of African descent. As a child, before the revolution, she had to start work at the age of 9. She explained, "I was one of the 70,000 maids that Cuba had before 1959. I couldn't enjoy much of my childhood. Now I've had the opportunity to work on the development of La Güinera and I feel like a new woman."

She narrated how her consciousness about transgender/homosexuality changed qualitatively while in a position of leadership.

Fifi remembered, "Marisela and the others came to see me. 'We want them in the cabaret. If you haven't seen them you can't object.'

"At first I rebelled," Fifi said, recalling her arguments: "I'm an older woman. I wasn't accustomed to running around with this 'class of people.' I said, 'No, keep them away. I don't want to hear about people who run around with a double façade.' … I said, 'No, please, I can't be around you guys. I wouldn't be doing my duty to society. I'm too old for this stuff. I've never been involved in these things.'"

But Marisela persisted. She said, "Fifi, I saw a show. Fifi, they should start at once here in the workers' cafeteria."


Mariposas en el Andamio
(Butterflies on the Scaffold)
WINNER
SILVER PALOUE INTERCOM
Chicago International Film Festival, 1996
"A LIVELY PORTRAIT OF CUBAN DRAG QUEENS... filled with vérité charm."
-VILLAGE VOICE -

Margarita Gilpin

The documentary 'Butterflies on the Scaffold' (Mariposas en el andamio) takes viewers to La Güinera, a neighborhood on the outskirts of Havana which has become a 'cradle of cross-dressing' in Cuba.

One drag performer said of Fifi, "She opened a cabaret in the workers' cafeteria and brought us into it. She made us face the 'herds' of public we were afraid to face. She reassured us. She said, "Do it, face them, you'll see, nothing will happen."

Another performer added, "Fifi should be honored by us. She'll always be close to our hearts for the wonderful way she treated us."

'A right to live as they wish'

This documentary was made during the "special period" in which Cuba had lost virtually all its trade when the USSR was overturned.

The U.S.-led economic blockade of Cuba also impacts on every aspect of life on the island: Performers use acetate because eyelash glue is not available. They create eyelashes out of horse hair or cut from carbon paper. Their nails are glued on with a shoe adhesive.

"Butterflies on the Scaffold" is packed with footage of indoor and outdoor drag performances in front of an audience of virtually all their co-workers and neighbors, family and friends. People of all ages attend the drag performances, arriving early for a good seat, or climbing onto a tree limb for a last-minute seat.

The performers take their bows to cheers and ovations.

A local congressional representative says, "[T]hey're giving the people something that others who aren't like them don't give."

A construction worker agreed. "They're the people who are giving this neighborhood a new level, a new character. Sometimes there's nothing to do and no place to go."

The performers play many other important roles in their community. They include a cook in a cafeteria for mechanics, a dentist, a baker, a dressmaker, a soldier just returned from an internationalist mission in Angola, a carpenter, a nurse, a horse trainer, a professor of Spanish literature and a professor of military topography.

These worker-sponsored drag shows in turn have been a fulcrum to lift consciousness about cross-dressing and male-bodied femininity and same-sex love. The process of change is apparent.

One young girl child of a cross-dressing performer, unequivocal and eloquent, told the interviewer: "I love my father with my life. I don't want anyone to be disrespectful to him. He's what he is. He wants to be that way, and he's a person and people have the right to live as they wish."

The child's parent, a drag performer, said, "I never deceived my kids. I tried to help them adapt to how things were, to how I felt – I never disguised myself as a 'man' – to know me as I am, to accept my friends. They need their own lives. My world is my world. But I don't want them to be estranged from who their father is and the work he does."

The pain in some families was palpable. One mother said when she found out her son was gay, "I felt real bad. Like all mothers, one wants the best for your children. We know he chose a difficult path … but in reality, it's not out of this world. … [H]e's my son and I would give my life for him."

A young man who says he is gay but not ready to do cross-dress performance said, "I have a fabulous family. They know all about me. They've known about me for 10 years and I'm 27. My family is exquisite. Up to now I haven't had problems. At first it was rough but once they realized it was my path, they accepted it and my friends, with their virtues and defects."

His father, working in the background, is asked, "What do you think of your son?"

The father answers, "No one's better. I couldn't ask for a better son. I'm grateful and proud he's my son. He's a good kid. He hasn't got any problems. He's A-1. Better than me and I'm his father."

After those words tumble out, the father and son hug each other.

The local doctor summed up, "The transvestite phenomenon marks a new era with perspectives for the union of humanity in love and mutual respect between human beings."

Fifi stressed, "I think this type of work should go on all over the country, because of the respect, pride and responsibility with which they work. If the nation accepts these cultural workers, these workers for the society, as we did here in La Güinera, we'll be successful as a nation."

Fifi concluded, "I think that our kids will grow up according to what we teach them. We have to explain the variety of life-styles in the world. They have to choose among them. If our kids get used to seeing men in drag, they'll see it as normal. We'll explain what a transvestite is and that child will choose a path to which their education leads and we'll create 'the new man.' Besides the new man will be brought up completely without any taboos!"

1990s: Broadcasting education 'to every home'

The revolutionary Cuban government, since the 1990s, has waged a struggle against deep-rooted old prejudice about same-sex love in virtually every cultural venue.

In 1998 a national television program opened a mass discussion about lesbians and gays to immense audience interest. The topic was discussed in communities for weeks afterwards. (Hatch)

Oberg wrote on his observations of homosexuality and culture in Cuba: "Between March 2000 and April 2002, I spent more than four months in Cuba on four separate occasions, working as a librarian on a range of research projects with my Cuban colleagues. Most of that time was spent in Havana, but also in numerous other cities, including Matanzas, Trinidad and Santiago de Cuba. As a gay man, I was motivated to find out as much as I could about the status of Cuba's gay and lesbian population."

Oberg referred to the cross-dressing, cross-gender performances in the neighborhood of La Güinera, on the outskirts of the capital: "Many of these drag shows are sponsored by the local CDRs (Committees for the Defense of the Revolution)," Olberg reported, "and play to large and wildly enthusiastic audiences. (If you're wondering, the performers were great!)"

Oberg stressed, "One of the most striking things about Cuba is the vitality of its cultural and intellectual life throughout the island, particularly in Havana. Gay themes are prevalent in the theatre, in lectures, and in concerts.

"In December, 2000, I attended a play entitled 'Muerte en el Bosque' (A Death in the Woods), produced by the Teatro Sotano in Havana 's Vedado neighborhood. Based upon the acclaimed novel 'Mascaras' (Masks), by Leonardo Padura Fuentes, the play follows a police investigation into the murder of a Havana drag queen, a plot device that allows for an examination of Cuban attitudes and prejudices towards gays at every level of society."

Oberg concluded, "A striking contradiction in Cuban society today is the contrast between the rich cultural and intellectual life that is widely available and easily affordable, and salaries that make the purchase of a pair of shoes an event for which one must plan."

He noted that Cubans could buy theater tickets for the equivalent of about a nickel, first-run movies for about a dime, theatrical plays for less than 50 cents, and musical extravaganzas and ballet festival performances for half a buck.

The U.S. blockade of Cuba, aimed at strangling the economy, makes it harder to buy a pair of shoes, let alone build socialism, which requires material abundance and often imported materials.

Wall Street hopes that economic deprivation will turn up the pressure cooker on internal relations, making it easier to wear down and overturn the revolution that took the Cuban economy, labor, land and resources off its list of neo-colonial "assets."

But the revolutionary government has continued to move forward on every front possible to generate consciousness, including about same-sex love.

"While in Cuba, I spoke with scores of gays, mostly men, and encountered none who said that their government was persecuting them," Oberg stated. He reiterated that no one with whom he spoke "reported active or systematic repression by the state."

Art and consciousness

AIDS prevention is only possible with widespread safer-sex information and a thoroughgoing struggle against sexual prejudices that allow the disease to spread in the silence of shame, guilt and fear. Revolutionary Cuban leadership brought the battle against AIDS and sexual prejudices – including bigoted attitudes about bisexuality – to the small screen of popular television, as well as the big screens of culture.

In 2006, the 115-chapter television series "The Hidden Face of the Moon" (La cara oculta de la luna), had virtually all of Cuba buzzing with debate. The series borrows from the popular style of television novellas – soap operas.

"La cara" deals with AIDS, youth sexuality, bisexuality and other social issues. The series began with the story of a 14-year-old girl who contracted AIDS during her first sexual experience.

As of November 2005, 5,422 Cubans were HIV-positive or had full-blown AIDS.

"La cara," wrote author Freddy Domínguez Díaz, was "a series on human behavior, on people's attitude of life, on everyone's responsibility for themselves and everybody else." (Betancourt)

Marlon Brito López, a screenwriter and director, critiqued the television novella "as a member of the audience and media expert." He wrote, "The main goals were well defined: a warning of the dangers of this pandemic disease, present also in our territory, which can infect people in any group, race or creed; and a reflection on the elimination of prejudice linked to HIV-AIDS and sex in our society, particularly within the family." (López)

Brito López stated, "I believe art is so ambiguous and abstract it has a latent effect on our consciousness, mainly when it reflects with honesty and talent the soci-

ety one lives in. This is precisely what 'The Hidden Face of the Moon' is achieving."

He continued, "AIDS statistics in the world increased alarmingly and in our country; despite the excellent professional project and public health plan to prevent infectious diseases, media campaigns on the HIV-AIDS subject had shown little efficacy. It is here where we artists must step in. Concerts and songs by Buena Fe [Cuban musical group], or documentaries by my colleague Belkys Vega and others, were not enough to reach our homes at prime time with an artistically effective language, with affection and respect."

Bringing education to every home

"La cara" series director Rafael "Cheíto" González explained, "When we deal with present-day stories, we try to be as close to reality as possible. Everywhere in the world there are soaps for entertainment. We try to discuss the social problems we have and therefore we deal with topics such as these. I believe it is valid to face them with all seriousness. In this soap there are some parallel stories aimed only at entertaining the audience, but we cannot overlook the problems we have, and these must be tackled with courage.

"What better way to do it than through a TV soap watched by the whole country? Information on HIV is offered in TV spots, there is also a specific TV program on AIDS, but these are not seen by everybody. The soap, on the other hand, is watched in every home." (Puyol)

Cheíto noted, "We did a lot of research to pull out all the stops, as popular speech has it, in approaching AIDS as a topic, that is, seriously and with all due respect, since we can't beat about the bush if we want to send an effective message." (Betancourt)

Magda González, a television director who now directs the Dramatizations Division for Cuban TV, also stressed, "When we decided to take on this theme in this slot, we were convinced that it would provoke all sorts of reactions. They're not themes that we usually deal with in a dramatized form, even though over the past three years they have been dealt with in a direct and open way by other programs like 'Let's Talk about Health' (a weekly program talking about health matters) and 'It's Worthwhile' (a weekly program in which a leading psychologist discusses letter writers' problems)."

But as the AIDS epidemic continued, "and because we consider we have a socially responsible role to play to put television in the front line of the Battle of Ideas, we decided that the dramatic format was an ideal way to disseminate messages using the emotions and the viewer's identification with the human dramas. When writing the script and producing the tele-serial we called upon experts from the Center for Sexual Education (Cenesex) and the National HIV-AIDS Prevention Center as advisers and we believe it mirrors realistically aspects of our society.

"The second theme incorporates a new element in teledramas," she continued, "the treatment of sexual relations between men either as homosexuals or bisexuals. Public reaction is divided. Some are indignant that the theme is shown on screen, others applaud the initiative, and still others say that these themes have to be aired but not in this way.

"That the first exists is only natural in people whose sexual attitudes were formed by a Hispanic culture, heavily influenced by the Catholic Church, where sex is a sin and homosexuality a crime. Hopefully the telenovela will help them understand that to respect, recognize and tolerate different lifestyles doesn't turn them into accomplices of what they believe to be evil, but that it makes them followers of the concept given to us by our Comandante when he says that 'The Revolution is about equality and full liberty, it's about being treated by everybody else as human beings.'" (Puyol)

This is revolutionary process

No one, of any sexuality, was of one mind in Cuba about "La cara." However, those who brought the series to television screens did not shy away from the debate. On the contrary, widespread public debate with leadership was the whole point, and it has been eminently successful.

The Cuban health-care system website "Infomed" garnered viewpoints about the television novella. So did Cuba's National Center for Sex Education (Cenesex). E-zine *La Jiribilla* devoted an entire issue to the topic.

Journalist Ricardo Ronquillo concluded, "It would be worrying if we thought of ourselves as a wholly agreeing society with neither competing arguments nor opposing positions in face of its most intimate conflicts; or even worse, that silence prevailed."

La Jornada correspondent Gerardo Arreola wrote, "This discussion has become the most relevant signs of public impact on the matter since the motion picture 'Fresa y Chocolate' ('Strawberry and Chocolate') shook sectors of Cuban society in 1993 with its statement against intolerance through the story of a homosexual character." (Arreola)

The *Miami Herald*, an unlikely source for any supportive news about Cuba, reported in November 2006, "Now, as the show draws to an end, Cuban gays and lesbians say the show is symbolic of the communist island's government and people becoming more accepting towards them." (See bibliography: "Cuban soap operas")

It is this process of popular education with leadership, in which consciousness is raised through mass participation, discussion and debate, that is the revolution and the "unfettered thought" it liberates – not overnight, but with ongoing labor, without which nothing is produced.

Cenesex continues to be at the forefront of that important work, including backing the television novella that sparked such controversy.

Cuba's Cenesex leads the way on sexual rights

Cuba's National Center for Sex Education (Centro Nacional de Educación Sexual) carries out its important collective labor – including combating what remains of pre-revolutionary prejudice against same-sex love – in what was once a privately owned Havana mansion.

Mariela Castro Espín, director of Cenesex, stressed that sexologists have a "scientific, social and political responsibility" to help raise understanding and consciousness in the whole population. (havanajournal.com, April 1, 2003)

Cenesex's goal, Castro Espín explained, is to contribute to "the development of a culture of sexuality that is full, pleasurable and responsible, as well as to promote the full exercise of sexual rights." (Reed)

Since she and Cenesex are part of the revolution, they don't have to do this work alone.

"Historically speaking," Castro Espín stated, "changing mentality is one of the most difficult things to do, one of the slowest processes in society. Even though we've made substantial political and legislative strides, we're still bound by aspects of roles defined long ago. This subjectivity begins early, in the way children are raised, in how they're taught to play.

"We have to learn to recognize which elements of the traditional masculinity or femininity are actually doing us damage. What parts of the picture actually take away from our freedom, fulfillment and dignity. We have to take a hard look at these things, or else we'll keep passing them down from generation to generation." (Reed)

She offered a concrete example about AIDS safer-sex education. "We have to include a gender perspective – promotion of new constructs of masculinity and femininity – and not just take an epidemiological approach."

She said an epidemiological approach to prevent AIDS transmission might simply suggest, "Use a condom."

But the system of male chauvinism imposed on Cuba for centuries created a mindset in which some males feel that condoms may be a sensation barrier to full sexual enjoyment, to which they are entitled. Castro Espín emphasized, "So, for him to use a condom, he has to begin to construct and define his masculinity in a different way, that doesn't put a premium only on his own pleasure. In the end, this stereotype is very dangerous to his own health as well as his partner's – and this can be true for homosexual as well as heterosexual couples, whenever a relationship defines that one partner has hegemony over the other.

"So you need to combine both an epidemiological and a gender approach to these very intimate issues. This is why, for example, our posters and other materials emphasize that protection of your partner against HIV and STIs in general is a sign of caring, and that means it's a responsibility of both partners in a relationship."

Castro Espín told *MEDICC Review* interviewer Gail A. Reed regarding Cenesex, "We work with groups who promote safe sex among their peers: men who have sex with men [MSM], transvestites and transsexuals, adolescents and young people in general and then more broadly with medical students. In each medical school, there's a department of Sexology and Education for Sexuality."

All education in Cuba, it bears repeating – including medical school – is free.

Castro Espín observed in 2006, "Regarding attitudes towards MSM and bisexuals as well, there have been positive changes – I say empirically, since we are still studying this. But at our conferences and workshops that we hold with people from the whole country, it's clear that participants are more able now than 10 years ago to understand and respect another sexual orientation. I think the work that's been done over the decade in health and by the Cuban Women's Federation has helped to bring about that change, and we've done it reaching out to people's sensitivity as human beings.

"In essence, our view is that any kind of prejudice or discrimination is damaging to health." (Reed)

'Modifying the social imagination'

As a revolutionary worker, Castro Espín demonstrates in every interview that she has already rolled up her sleeves to do the next job that needs to be done.

She talked about the revolutionary labor that is still required to make progress in overcoming old prejudices about same-sex love. "First," she told Reed, "I think we have to work more and better in the schools. We've worked with the Ministry of Education, but I'm still not satisfied we've made enough progress, and so we need to deepen understanding among teachers and other school staff; we need to carry more on educational TV and so on.

"And this also has to do with a gender focus, of course. In the 70s and 80s, we found a lot of fear and resistance to a national program for sex education with such a gender focus. The program was finally accepted in 1996, and now it's taught throughout the country; since then it has reduced school dropouts from early marriages and childbirth by one half."

Castro Espín elaborated, "The country now has policies that legitimize sexual orientations and also has brought laws in line with a gender perspective. But on the legislative front, there is still a lot to be done."

She has proposed that when the Cuban Constitution of the Republic is next revised, the category of "sexual orientation" be added. Castro Espín said homosexual Cubans are protected, but "when something like that is made explicit, it is official recognition that there is a need to avoid any type of discrimination, like racism or sexism."

Such a legal measure, she pressed, would make this protection even more evident. And, she added, it's important to protect against discrimination, not just in public institutions "but also in the space of the family, because it is often there that a homosexual is first insulted or rejected."

No Cuban of any sex has to marry in order to have economic support, a job, a home, health care or other rights that are guaranteed to every person. Castro Espín pointed out, though, that although homosexuals live within the law in consensual relationships, "gay marriage" is not recognized, so you have many issues such as inheritance that aren't fully resolved. We need changes in the family code itself related to these and other questions, including domestic violence. Cenesex has now presented two bills in Parliament before the education and children's commissions that have to do with gender," she noted, "and these have been well received."

Unofficial same-sex marriages have taken place on the island. For example, four local young males ranging in ages from 17 to 22 held a double same-sex ceremony outdoors, in front of loved ones and neighbors, in the working-class suburb of San Miguel del Padrón, southeast of Havana, in 2001. (Berkowitiz, Cabral)

Castro Espín summed up, "By the 1970s, reforms to the penal code excluded the classification of homosexuals as criminals (because of their sexual orientation); any word that discriminated against homosexuals was modified.

"However," she stressed, "that is not enough because I think our laws should better reflect the respect that homosexuals deserve. Greater and more professional work is needed at the micro-social level, because what this is about is trying to change perceptions, modifying the social imagination." (Garcia)

Teresa Gutierrez

Leslie Feinberg, shortly after initiating the Rainbow Solidarity for the Cuban Five Campaign, presents Cuban Ambassador Rodrigo Malmierca Díaz with copies of her books.

Fidel Castro backs effort

Cuba's Cenesex proposes ground-breaking transsexual rights

Mariela Castro Espín, director of Cuba's National Center for Sex Education (Cenesex), recalled that three decades ago a Cuban from Matanzas who was born female-bodied but identified as male came to Havana for help.

In response, Cuban revolutionary leader and president of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), Vilma Espín, recommended in 1979 that a special committee be established, coordinated by the National Work Group on Sex Education – Cenesex's predecessor. The FMC had formed the Work Group in 1972; Cenesex was established in 1989.

The first result, Castro Espín related, was an agreement with the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Justice to issue new identity papers. Three transsexual Cubans got new identity documents under that accord.

In 1988, the first sex-reassignment surgery – from male to female – was carried out successfully in Cuba. The operation was successful and the person reportedly lives without difficulty.

But the media coverage, Castro Espín remembered, was tinged with more sensationalism than science. Historically unchallenged prejudice welled up. As a result, the Cenesex director explained, the operations were temporarily halted until the need for them could be explained to the population. Clinical and psychological care continued for transsexual Cubans, but with a lower profile.

Castro Espín stated in the January 2006 *La Jornada* interview, "We were unable to convince people of the need to carry out these operations. This reluctance also came from the professionals in the Ministry of Public Health who were not experts on the subject. This is where I feel the strongest resistance, even as we speak."

Journalist Gerardo Arreola added that in recent years, "A group of transsexuals joined Cenesex and were trained as sex health promoters in the campaign for the prevention of AIDS. In the center they have a permanent open debate forum and receive specialized care. The health system provides them with free hormone treatment."

Sex change and social change

"At the beginning of 2004," Arreola wrote, "there was a new momentum when Cenesex launched a national strategy: it increased and diversified its professional staff, obtained support from President Fidel Castro and directly contacted ministries and social organizations to discuss, based on entity profile, the subject of transsexuals."

Two years later, Castro Espín said, this move has accelerated change. "It seems all this work is now bearing fruit. People are now more receptive. We have also articulated a more persuasive discourse. I see great flexibility, even among official leaders."

Castro Espín, as director of Cenesex, took a plan about expanding rights for transsexuals to two parliamentary committees on Dec. 20, 2005.

Granma reported the following day that Cenesex had "released results of a survey on gender identity in today's Cuban society to the committees on Education, Culture, Science, Technology and the Environment, and Youth, Children and Women's Rights.

"Mariela Castro said that for people with a non-traditional gender identity to fully develop their potential as a member of society, it is first necessary to identify them so as to assure that they receive adequate specialized assistance. She also noted the need in Cuban society of a profound understanding of gender and sexuality."

Correspondent Gerardo Arreola interviewed Castro Espín, in the Jan. 9, 2006, issue of *La Jornada*, about the move to widen rights for transsexuals. Castro Espín outlined that her proposal to parliament would make free sex reassignment surgery and hormones available to all transsexual Cubans – all forms of health care are provided cost-free on the island. New identity documents would also be immediately issued.

Arreola reported, "This is part of a national policy to recognize the rights of these people to live a full life in the gender they chose."

Castro Espín stated, "The draft was very well received by the representatives in the two commissions examining the project." She added, "They not only accepted the proposal, but asked many questions and made recommendations."

By 2006, a transsexual Cuban woman traveled abroad on her new passport. Four others who had sex reassignment surgeries abroad got changed identity papers as soon as they returned home. "The Courts of Justice were finally convinced," Castro Espín concluded.

In early 2007, Cuba's National Assembly of Popular Power agreed to discuss making sex-reassignment surgery free of cost to all transsexuals on the island who request it.

The newsletter "Diversity" (Diversidad) reported: "The measure would complement the present Identity Law that already acknowledges the right of citizens to change name and sexual identity. This places Cuba at the vanguard of the legislations that acknowledge the rights of transvestites, transsexuals and transgender in Latin America." ("Cuban Parliament")

In fact, by also providing free health care, Cuba is truly leading the world in rights for transsexual and gender-variant people.

Revolution takes work

Mariel Castro Espín and Cenesex don't rest on these laurels. She emphasized the need for legislation and other actions to block discrimination and raise popular consciousness.

A job is a right in Cuba. However, she said, "there may be transsexuals who have a job and are not rejected, because the law protects them, even if they go cross-dressed. But the administrators always find a way to get rid of them."

Addressing a conflict between revolutionary security police and trans Cubans two years earlier, Castro Espín was very clear. She stated that neighbors had complained about street solicitation. But when the security police arrested transsexuals and transvestites, based on an assumption that they were prostitutes, Castro Espín stressed that they were acting on backward ideas and prejudice.

"The police take measures – that's what they are there for," she explained, "but they interpret things with their own way of thinking. They have learned over their lifetimes that transsexuals and homosexuals are intrinsically bad." (Rodriquez)

"This attitude was not in keeping with the policy or the law, because these do not penalize a person for cross-dressing." (Arreola)

Castro Espín noted, "We have been given procedural guidelines so these people know how to defend themselves in case of police transgression of the regulations. " (Arreola)

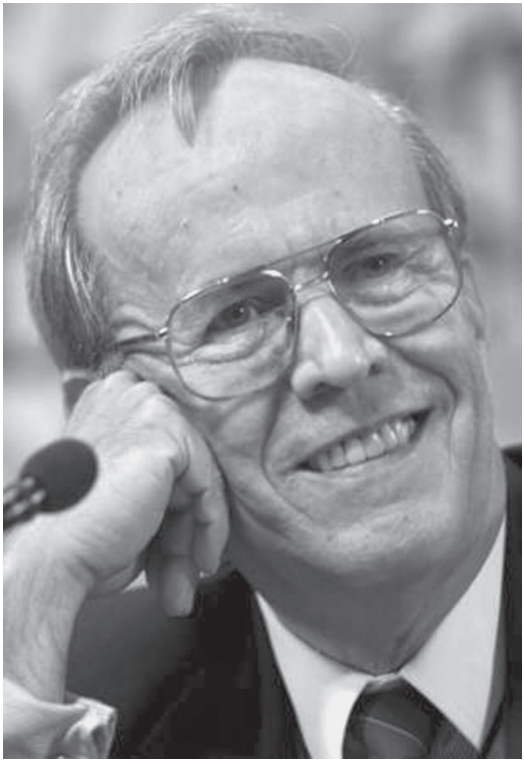
She explained that Cenesex intervened and set up a channel of communication with the revolutionary security forces and the Ministry of the Interior. Together they ordered police not to hassle transgender and transsexual Cubans. They also agreed to provide education to Cuba's National Revolutionary Police, including a seminar on distinct expressions of gender and sexuality. (Arreola)

Castro Espín noted that the transsexual and transgender Cubans who had been harassed came right to Cenesex to lodge complaints and demand redress. "Of course, they came to demand their rights, because I don't know if you have noticed, we Cubans have a strong sense of justice and fight when we have to," she said. (González)

"They spoke of everything that bothered them. I asked if I could tape what they had said to prepare a report. And that's what I did; a short report so they could read it over rapidly and then a longer one with many annexes.

"That is how a national strategy came about for attention to transsexuals with an integral vision since 1979, which was created by my mother, Vilma Espín, president of the Cuban Women's Federation. What we did was to broaden this work, to enrich it." (Mariela Castro Espín's father is acting Cuban President Raul Castro.)

"We are even carrying out a very important study on representations of transsexuality," she concluded, "to carry out educational campaigns to teach society to respect these people and respect their rights." (González)



Ricardo Alarcon, president of Cuba's National Assembly, stated in spring 2007: 'We have to abolish any form of discrimination' against homosexuality. He explained, 'We are trying to see how to do that, whether it should be to grant them the right to marry or to have same-sex unions. We have to redefine the concept of marriage. Socialism should be a society that does not exclude anybody.'

Cuba: 'Bringing revolution's humanity to all aspects of life'

'I want to bring the revolution's humanity to those aspects of life that it hasn't reached because of old prejudices," Mariela Castro Espín, who has worked hard to eradicate pre-revolutionary prejudices about same-sex love, transsexuality and gender variance in Cuba, said in summer 2006. (Israel)

Castro Espín is director of Cuba's National Center for Sex Education (Cenesex), which has accomplished a great deal in a relatively short time to replace prejudices about same-sex love and transsexuality with positive attitudes.

Cenesex created its own Internet web site – www.Cenesex.sld.cu – shortly after the 16th World Congress of Sexology met in Havana in March 2003.

Cenesex's site incorporates a section on sexual diversity, which offers in Spanish and English basic information, opportunities to consult with experts, and voicing of public opinion.

The site gets right to the point about its objective, which it states is to "overcome the taboos and prejudices that persist about same-sex love: Being homosexual or bisexual is not a disease, it is not synonymous with perversity, nor does it constitute a crime."

Homosexuality, the web site makes clear, "is a sexual orientation that is not caused by seduction at any age, it is not contagious, and is not acquired by educational defects or negative examples in the family environment."

This Internet site receives the most visits – 150,000 "hits" a day – of any Cuban World Wide Web portal. (IPS/GIN, July 3, 2004)

Castro Espín said in the summer of 2004 that these developments are "the result of an effort of more than 30 years, and now we are seeing its fruits more clearly." (Acosta)

Work accomplished, work to do

When asked by a BBC reporter in September 2006 whether perceptions about homosexuality had changed in Cuban society, Mariela Castro Espín answered, "I think so; it has changed very much." (González)

She told interviewer Eduardo García Jiménez, "I do believe that since the 1990s there is greater acceptance of the presence of homosexuals by some portion of the population and public institutions. That does not mean that the contradiction has been resolved for all individuals at all levels of society.

Castro Espín added, "I think we are at a good moment to implement policies that are more explicit about the defense of the human rights of homosexuals, so that we are better prepared to confront any manifestation of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. I see this very humanistic attempt to achieve greater respect for the rights of homosexuals as the waging of a battle of ideas in our society. I believe this notion has to be part of the cultural and political battle because that would mean a cultural, social and political strengthening for the Cuban Revolution."

Castro Espín said she is advocating for an amendment to the Cuban Constitution to add homosexuality to the groups against which discrimination is outlawed. "It is a proposal I am making from my position of responsibility as the director of the Cenesex. I assure you it has been heard by receptive listeners. My proposal is in no way removed or distant from the spirit of the revolution, or from the entire process that has brought about this call to a battle of ideas.

"It would be wonderful to be able to spark meaningful, inter-group discussion on this subject," Castro Espín emphasized, "so that Cuban society could develop a healthier culture of sexuality, one that is fairer, that helps to erode old, erroneous beliefs and prejudices that emphasize sexual orientation.

"Something like this would put the revolution even more in line with its humanistic ethic; the Cuban Revolution has been possible because of the participation of all men and women, of all Cubans who have identified with the conquests and dreams of that social project. Among all those who have participated there are also people of diverse sexual orientations."

Don't measure with imperial ruler

As earlier articles in this series documented, the CIA, Hollywood and corporate media tried to deflect resistance to U.S. imperialism's covert war against Cuba, and its domestic discrimination, police brutality and bashing of same-sex-loving and gender-variant people, by focusing on the onerous tasks Cuba's revolution faced in uprooting centuries of prejudice about same-sex love. Of course, each poisonous seed had been planted and cultivated by U.S. capitalism and, earlier, Spanish colonialism.

However, Castro Espín stated categorically to journalist Mary Lamey via a translator, "There is no official repression of lesbians and gays in Cuba. What remains are social and cultural reactions that must be transformed, the same as in many other countries." (Lamey)

She pointed to the bashings of transsexuals and homosexuals in England and other imperialist countries: "This doesn't exist in Cuba. The Cuban population is much more respectful of differences than in other places." She emphasized, "When I'm afraid I will find a very strong resistance, I find a high degree of sensibility in the Cuban population."

Today, the Cuban Revolution has made enormous strides in raising popular consciousness about sexual liberation, including same-sex love. Building ties of unity will require conscious leadership of the most resolutely anti-imperialist activists in the liberation movement for LGBT and other sexually, sex- and gender-oppressed peoples.

Yet some activists in the U.S. still argue that Cuba won't have "passed the test" until lesbians and gays are "out" in Cuba with their own autonomous organizational formations.

Cubans defining their own liberation

In a capitalist country, being "out" is not only an assertion of individual identity and personhood. The movement to end the oppression has to be "out" and independent, as well. That is because of the LGBT movement's relationship to its own ruling class in capitalist countries. In the class struggle, it is imperative for the movement to break free of its own capitalist bosses and their ideology. In that case, the movement is only as powerful as it is independent.

But what about a socialist country in which the laboring class rules and is trying to build socialism in the liberated turf of a workers' state?

An international network of both LGBT social democrats and those far to the right of them in the imperialist countries, particularly the U.S. and Britain, makes an appeal to Cubans, and others in countries menaced by imperial powers, to identify with them based on what is presumed to be shared identity. In turn, this network asserts its readiness to defend gay and lesbian Cubans and others – but only against their own people, culture and national liberation struggle.

When aligned with overall and sometimes specific imperialist interests, such a position can offer a "left cover" for regime change – through covert and/or military intervention.

Defend Cuba!

Cubans are defining their own liberation.

The Cuban Revolution merits the support of progressives and communists around the world, without demands that it measure up as "perfect" using an imperial ruler. A socialist revolution is a process, not a single act. Solving the economic and social problems that the capitalists cannot and will not tackle is the dynamic forward motion of revolution.

Regarding the revolution's efforts to eliminate old prejudice against homosexuality, Fidel Castro concluded during a 1988 interview with a Galician television station: "Given that we can make mistakes, we obsessively follow the idea [of] what is just, right and best for the people, and what is most humane for our people and our society. However, the task is not easy – I think that each time we get closer to

the right criteria for making the world we want. Nonetheless, I think that we still have many faults, and that future generations will have to continue to perfect this new world." (Hillson)

The whole population of Cuba – of all races, sexes, genders, sexualities, ages and abilities – does not need to be defended against its own culture or its own revolution. It needs and deserves defense against the U.S. blockade of its island and every other illegal act of imperialist war, overt and covert, which impedes revolutionary progress.

International support for Cuba's right to sovereignty and self-determination will allow the island's population to spend more time, energy and resources on socialist construction, rather than on defense.

It is the LGBT movements in the imperialist citadels that have to break with their own ruling classes in order to build bonds of genuine international solidarity. It's a hard position to take. It requires ideological valor; the refusal to remain silent about the emperor's "new" clothing.

The Cuban Revolution has had to take up the tasks that history presented it, including the eventual eradication of the legacies of racism, sexism and anti-gay bigotry.

In order to move forward toward their own liberation, the LGBT and other progressive movements in the U.S. and other capitalist countries have to combat anti-communism – which is, in the long run, a loyalty oath to capitalism – and develop a powerful anti-imperialist current that can extend its solidarity to Cuba and all countries fighting for their sovereignty and self-determination against finance capital.

Revolutionary Cuba – the "hope of the hemisphere" – has done a better job dealing with its tasks. ▼

'Cuba: Estamos contigo!'

Rainbow Solidarity for Cuban Five circles globe

A multi-national, multi-lingual group of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) activists in the United States – the belly of the beast – issued a call in Spanish and English for Rainbow Solidarity for the Cuban Five in mid-January 2007.

The five political prisoners – Gerardo Hernández, Antonio Guerrero, Ramón Labañino, Fernando González and René González – are collectively serving four life sentences and 75 years in far-flung U.S. penitentiaries. The "crime" they were convicted of is having infiltrated CIA-backed fascist commando groups in order to halt terror attacks against Cuba from U.S. soil.

The Rainbow Solidarity call demands a new trial and freedom for these political prisoners, defense of Cuban sovereignty and self-determination and a halt to the illegal U.S. acts of war against Cuba – including the economic blockade and CIA trained, funded and armed attacks by mercenary "contra" armies operating from this country.

This initiative was consciously issued by LGBT and other activists battling oppression based on sexuality, gender expression and sex – one of the progressive movements targeted by the imperialist campaign to vilify Cuba.

This was not the first act of solidarity with Cuba by left-wing LGBT activists in the United States – not by a long shot. But the response to the Rainbow Solidarity initiative – swift and dramatic – signals a new day for LGBT support worldwide for Cuba.

Within hours and days after the call went out over the Internet, hundreds of individuals and organizations signed on to the call, posted on the www.nyfreethefive.org web site (look for the rainbow).

Most exciting was how many of the signers immediately began forwarding the call to their e-mail lists.

Volunteers from around the world translated the introduction and call for Rainbow Solidarity to free the Cuban Five into simplified and traditional Chinese, Tagalog, Farsi, Turkish, Greek, Croatian, Portuguese, Italian, Danish, Japanese, French and German. More translations in the works or planned include Swahili, Urdu, Indonesian, Arabic, Korean, Bengali and a streaming video in ASL (American Sign Language).

International endorsements flooded in from Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Denmark, England, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, India, Iran, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxemburg,

Mexico, Montenegro, New Zealand, occupied Palestine, Philippines, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Romania, Scotland, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Wales and other countries and nations and from Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Individuals and groups from every state in the continental U.S. signed on as well – from southern Florida to the Pacific Northwest, Southern California to Maine.

All told, they form an extraordinary and broad arc of a united front. A frequently updated list of signers is posted at www.freethefiveny.org.

Many names on the growing list will be recognizable as well-known LGBT activists and others battling oppression based on sexuality, gender and sex, including women's liberationists.

This roster also reveals that many of these activists are also some of the hardest-working organizers in movements here and around the world against imperialist war, neo-liberalism, neo-colonialism, national oppression, racism, police brutality, prison and death penalty abolition, sweatshops and capitalist globalization.

These are also leading activists in the struggle for immigrant rights; women's liberation, including reproductive rights; jobs; labor union, tenant and community organizing; education; health care and affordable housing; freedom for all U.S. political prisoners and for prisoner rights; liberation of oppressed nations; support for Cuba, and the revolutionary movement to overturn capitalism and build an economy based on planning to meet peoples' needs.

Expansive political spectrum

Early signers include Teresa Gutierrez, a long-time leader in the struggle to free the Cuban Five; former political prisoner and leading prison abolitionist Angela Y. Davis; Leslie Cagan, national coordinator of United for Peace and Justice; Lei-Lani Dowell, national coordinator of FIST (Fight Imperialism, Stand Together); Stephen Funk, the U.S. Marine who was the first imprisoned Iraq War conscientious objector; Bev Tang, organizer for Anakbayan, the youth group of Bayan; Gerry Scoppettuolo, co-founder of GALLAN (Pride At Work, Boston); Lani Ka'ahumanu, BiNET USA; anti-imperialist activist Joo-Hyun Kang; Atlanta community activist Pat Hussain; Camille Hopkins, director of NYTRO (New York Transgender Rights Organization) of Western New York; transgender activist Moonhawk River Stone; and Jesse Lokahi Heiwa, Queer People Of Color Action.

Rauda Morcos, general coordinator of Aswat-Palestinian Gay Women, signed on. The Puerto Rican Alliance of Los Angeles and its coordinator Lawrence Reyes have endorsed. Activists Barbara Smith and Margo Okazawa-Rey signed. The two were among the founders of the Combahee River Collective, a group of Black feminists of all sexualities who issued a historic 1977 statement against the "interlocking" system of "racial, sexual, heterosexual and class oppression."

Former political prisoners Laura Whitehorn and Linda Evans added their names. Louisville, Ky., filmmaker and activist Sonja de Vries, director of the documentary "Gay Cuba," and Walter Lippmann, editor-in-chief of CubaNews, signed on. Other activists and organizations working in defense of Cuba also added weight to the call, including Cuba Education Tours, Vancouver, B.C., Canada; Fairness Campaign, Louisville, Ky.; Simon McGuinness, secretary of the Free the Miami Five Campaign, Ireland; Brigitte Oftner, coordinator of the Austrian Free the Five committee; Viktor Dedaj, webmaster of the Cuba Solidarity Project; the Cuba Edmonton Solidarity Committee in Alberta, Canada; the Swiss Cuba Association; Deutsche Kommunistische Partei Cuba Arbeitsgruppe, Germany; and No War on Cuba, Washington, D.C.

Groups include the national organization Pro-Gay Philippines; Audre Lorde Project – a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Two Spirit and Transgender People of Color center for community organizing, focusing on the New York City area; FIERCE! – a community organization for Transgender, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Two Spirit, Queer, and Questioning (TLGBTSQQ) youth of color in New York City; QUIT! (Queers Undermining Israeli Terrorism); LAGAI-Queer Insurrection; Stonewall Warriors, Boston; Greek Homosexual Community, Athens, Greece; Queertoday.com, Boston, Mass.; and Queers Without Borders, Hartford, Conn. The Queer Caucus of the National Lawyers Guild; Stephen Whittle, professor of equalities law and the British organization Press for Change at the School of Law at Manchester Metropolitan University, endorsed. So did Barbara Findlay, co-chair of the Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender Issues Section, BC Branch, Canadian Bar Association; and the law office of Lenore Rae Shefman, San Francisco, Calif.

Many transgender and transsexual organizations and individuals strengthened the initiative, including Trans Action Canada; three national Italian trans groups: Coordinamento Nazionale Trans FTM, Movimento Identità Transessuale and Crisalide Azione Trans; playwrite and performer Imani Henry; Matt/ilda a.k.a. Matt Bernstein Sycamore, editor "Nobody Passes," San Francisco, Calif.; Cianán Russell, chair of the Indiana Transgender Rights Advocacy Alliance; and the Winona Gender Mutiny Collective.

Endorsers include The National Lavender Green Caucus; Doug Barnes and the Freedom Socialist Party; Starlene Rankin, Green National Committee delegate of the Lavender Caucus of the Green Party of the United States; Orange County Peace & Freedom Party, Anaheim, Calif; and the LGBT Caucus of Workers World Party.

Among the signers are individuals and organizations whose activist work includes the struggle against women's oppression: Brenda Stokely, a leader of the Million Worker March Movement and NYCLAW; transnational feminist theorist Chandra Talpade Mohanty; Sara Flounders, co-director of the International

Action Center; Women's Fightback Network, Boston, Mass.; Melinda Clark, local co-founder of Code Pink in Willits, Calif.; Welfare Warriors, Milwaukee, Wis.; League of Women Voters in Montenegro; and Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) chapters in Washington, D.C.; Rome, Italy; and the Canadian Section in British Columbia.

Many LGBT labor activists have added their names and/or the endorsement of their unions, including the Pride at Work/GALLAN (Gay and Lesbian Labor Action Network), Boston, Mass, AFL-CIO; Bus Riders Union/Labor Community Strategy Center, Los Angeles, Calif.; and from Canada: Canadian Union Of Postal Workers, Calgary, Alberta; Canadian Union of Public Employees, Toronto, Ont.; and Hospital Employees' Union, Burnaby, B.C.

There's no end in sight to this rainbow.

Grassroots diplomacy

The Rainbow Solidarity for the Cuban Five initiative is also giving voice to individuals who, living in capitalist democracies, have little political input.

The Rainbow Solidarity call has become a poll that reveals a new grassroots sentiment as signers eloquently register their outrage at the continued imprisonment of the five Cubans and at Washington's economic and political blockade of Cuba and other illegal and covert acts of war.

Rebecca writes from San Diego, Calif., "Free the Cuban Five!! No more political prisoners!"

David from New York State stresses how biased the trial venue was for the Five: "[The] Five Cubans were trying to stop the ultra-right terrorist groups in Miami from carrying out violent actions against the people of Cuba. Miami is the one city in the U.S. where the Five certainly could not receive a fair trial."

Paul says: "As a gay man in South Florida who calls for freedom for our brothers, the Five, I am delighted to see this initiative. THEY MUST BE FREE!"

Tighe supports the five as "those most important defenders of everyone's right to live without fear of terrorism. The patriotic Cuban Five [are] illegally held political prisoners in a country with the most of its own people behind bars."

Barry, who grew up in Miami, adds the need to organize to close down the U.S. prison at Guantanamo and free all those held there.

"T." from California comments, "These five men, fighting against terrorism, have been imprisoned by the U.S. government – 'MY' government! Jailing heroes and supporting terror, while pretending to do the opposite, is sadly all the public can count on from 'our' hypocritical, double-speaking, global corporate-run excuse for a 'by and for the people' government."

Brian states from Newport, Ore., "I am enraged by the hypocrisy of five innocent men being held in prison under harsh circumstances while known terrorist

Luis Posada Carriles goes scot-free. While Bush and cronies spout off that no nation that harbors terrorists will be tolerated with one face, they set a convicted terrorist murderer of at least 73 innocents free with the other, while holding five innocent men in prison."

Adela, from the Zig Zag Young Women's Resource Centre Inc. in Queensland, Australia, states, "I want to express my solidarity with the Cuban Five and the Cuban people and Fidel."

Richard, from Madera, Calif., says succinctly, "It's way past time to change our policy toward Cuba and the Cuban people."

Jerry, from Athletes United for Peace, U.S.-El Salvador Sister Cities, Nicaragua Solidarity Committee, writes: "These people were trying to prevent an act of terrorism. The country that claims to lead the 'War On Terror' is imprisoning them."

Marcos writes from Bielefeld, Germany, "Free the Five Cubans now, stop the war on Cuba and the rest of the world!"

Richard, in Jacksonville, Ill., says, "Close Guantánamo, human rights are for humans everywhere."

Ray from Farmington, Conn., suggests, "Put Cheney and Bush in jail instead of the Cuban Five."

Yancy, from the LGBTQI Desk of Bayan USA, affirms: "Mabuhi ang panaghiusang international!!! Long live international solidarity!!"

Solidarity is not charity

Eric from Milwaukee reminds, "Ah, the things we gain from solidarity."

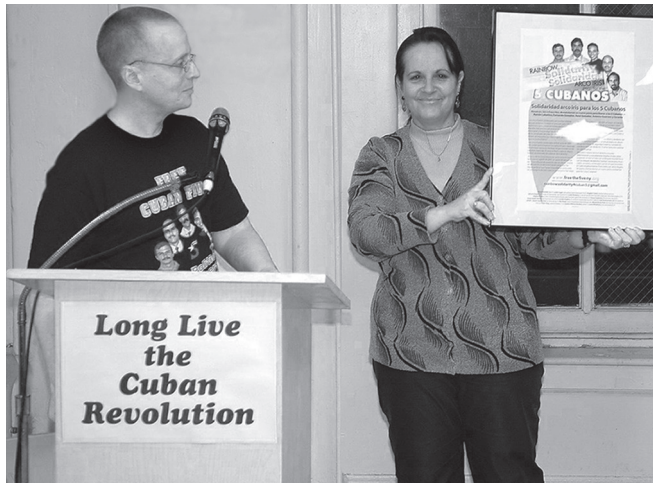
It is in the interests of LGBT activists and organizations in the U.S. and other imperialist countries to break with their own ruling classes and extend their own unilateral declaration of peace to a socialist country. And by rejecting anti-communism, the movement against sexual, gender and sex oppression can combat capitalist ideology – a giant step towards liberation.

Cuba has much to teach those who yearn for the right to live and love without fear or censure about what it takes to begin the process of literally eradicating white supremacy, patriarchy and prejudice against same-sex love and gender/sex diversity; what it takes to create a new woman, a new man, a new human being, and new forms of communist comradeship.

The Cuban people fought back against enslavement for half a millennium. For the last half century they have resisted the most powerful slave-master in history, just 90 miles from their shores.

The famous labor union song poses the question sharply: Which side are you on?

Rainbow Solidarity answers: "*Cuba, estamos contigo*. Cuba we are with you."



Alicia González of the Federation of Cuban Women (Federación de Mujeres Cubanas, FMC) holds up gift of first Rainbow Solidarity for the Cuban Five poster presented by Leslie Feinberg at a Workers World Party International Women's Day commemoration meeting March 9, 2007 in New York City.

Tami Starlight, director of Trans Action Canada: *"I support this fully!"*

Lynda, from Elk, Calif.: *"Please add my name to the call to free the Cuban 5 (I am a lesbian)."*

Tim: *"My partner and I are with you 100 percent."*

Joan, from Brooklyn, N.Y.: *"I have long been outraged by the terrible injustice of their situation."*

Larry of the Scottish Socialist Freedom Movement: *"It is time these Cubans had a fair trial and it is recognized they were protecting their homeland from U.S.-sponsored terrorism."*

Richard from Wappingers Falls, N.Y., states, *"It is wrong, it is immoral and unjust what the U.S. is doing to these five men."*

Jay, from Shrewsbury, England, emphasizes, *"It's about time they were out of there and back home."*

Sandy, from Paterson, N.J., says, *"This is a miscarriage of justice."*

Barry Morley, secretary-treasurer of the Community Business and Professionals Association of Canada, states, *"It is time for the Bush administration to stop the hypocrisy and make terrorism against Cuba illegal."*

First public event for Rainbow Solidarity for the Cuban Five at the New York City LGBT Community Center on June 2, 2007. From left: Helena Wong, Benjamin Ramos, Leslie Feinberg, LeiLani Dowell, Joan Gibbs, Teresa Gutierrez and Yancy Mark Gandionco (not seen in this photo) applauded Secretary Jorge Luis Dustet from the United Nations Cuban Mission as he holds up poster with the names of the first 1,000 signers of the call for Rainbow Solidarity with the Cuban Five.

Chien San Feng, professor in the Department of Journalism, National Cheng Chi University, in Taipei, Taiwan, sends this message: *"The U.S. should lift the embargo."*

Dale Pfeiffer, author of "Eating Fossil Fuels," writes from Irvine, Ky.: *"It is long past time for the U.S. to recognize Cuba's right to determine its own form of government. In the years to come, U.S. respect for Cuba will be extremely important to the welfare of the U.S. public, as industrialized, U.S.-style agriculture results in a food crisis for which Cuba has pioneered the only possible solution. It is time to honor Cuba, not vilify it. Let this honor begin with the freedom of the Cuban Five."*

Adela, counselor at the Zig Zag Young Women's Resource Centre Inc. in Brisbane, Australia: *"As a citizen of the world, I demand the U.S. government to free the five Cubans who have not committed any crime. I also demand the U.S. government to lift the economic embargo against the Cuban people."*

Joan, from St. Paul, Minn.: *"I have written Fernando Gonzáles approximately twice a week since March of 2003. I have learned so much from him. The Five are examples for the world, just as the Cuban Revolution has always been an example for the world. I greatly appreciate your work in supporting the Five, and I know the Five and their families also greatly appreciate your beautiful efforts. Thank you!!!!!!"*

Melinda, a local co-founder of Code Pink in Willits, Calif., says of the Cuban Five: *"Thank you to all who have been fighting for their survival and publicity. They will be freed."*

Robert Taylor, from the Bus Riders Union/Labor Community Strategy Center, writes from Los Angeles, *"Let's keep the fight on to free the Cuban Five from jail!"*

Monty, from Jamul, Calif., stresses, *"Please get the word out to keep up the pressure."*

David, from New State, concludes: *"To all justice-loving people in the U.S. and around the world, we appeal to you to join the struggle to free Fernando, René, Antonio, Ramón and Gerardo. Help us in outreach, education and organizing, because once people know the facts of the case, we are sure they will call for their freedom as well."*

Postscript:
Cuba surpasses world on same-sex, trans rights

The Communist Party of Cuba has welcomed an update of the revolutionary Family Code to include same-sex and trans rights, reported National Center for Sexual Education (Cenesex) Director Mariela Castro Espín at the 5th International Culture and Development Congress held in Havana on June 11-14, 2007.

Journalist Dalia Costa reported from Havana on June 18, "If the initiative is approved, gay and lesbian couples would enjoy the same civil, patrimonial, inheritance, housing and adoption rights as heterosexual couples." (caribbean360.com)

Costa added, "Norma Guillart, an expert involved in the work of a group of lesbians in Cenesex, told IPS that the reform would also recognize the right of any woman to assisted reproduction services, which are currently limited to married couples."

Castro Espín said that in expectation of the legal changes, a request has already been filed with the Ministry of Public Health to provide reproductive assistance to three lesbian couples. (Cuban News Agency)

The amendment to the Family Code, Costa stated, would also "stipulate that the family has the responsibility and duty to accept and care for all of its members, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation."

The planned reform, drafted by the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) and backed by Cenesex, will be introduced to the people's parliament as a draft law.

Same-sex marriage

Currently in the U.S., efforts by Republicans and Democrats – both political parties of capitalist big business – have pushed for reactionary legislation defining marriage as "between a man and a woman" solely to block the rights of same-sex couples.

But in Cuba, Article 36 of the Family Code of the revolutionary workers' state was defending the rights of women emerging from colonial and imperialist patriarchal enslavement when it codified in 1975 that "marriage is the voluntary union between a man and a woman."

In Cuba today, common law couples enjoy the same rights as married couples. And children all have the same rights, whether born to single women, couples who are unmarried, married, living together, separated or divorced. (caribbean360.com)

Ricardo Alarcón, president of Cuba's National Assembly, stated in the spring, "We have to abolish any form of discrimination" against homosexuality. He explained, "We are trying to see how to do that, whether it should be to grant them the right to marry or to have same-sex unions. We have to redefine the concept of marriage. Socialism should be a society that does not exclude anybody."

Castro Espín said that the proposal to add same-sex marriage to the Cuban Constitution will be taken up when that charter is next amended. "For now," she added, "it is sufficient to reform the Family Code, which is recognized as a branch of Cuban law."

In her presentation on the last day of the international congress, Castro Espín emphasized, "The political will exists to eliminate all forms of discrimination in our laws."

"Laws by themselves are not sufficient for achieving real change," she noted, but they are necessary to achieve forward momentum.

Trans rights moving forward

The proposed reforms to the Family Code also serve to bolster Cenesex's 2004 national strategy to support the needs of transsexual and transgender Cubans. This plan, Castro Espín explained, "is already being put into effect." (caribbean360.com)

The plan involves winning greater acceptance in the educational system and consciousness-raising among the revolutionary security forces.

Sex reassignment surgery – cost-free, like all forms of health care in Cuba – will be more available on request.

Twenty-four transsexual Cubans, who have won support from Cenesex since 1979, have applied for surgery. Many of them have already had their identity documents amended. Some 40 other Cubans have applied for sex-reassignment.

"Nearly everything is ready," Castro Espín concluded. "An internal Public Health Ministry regulation has authorized the performance of this surgery by the specialized health services, and work has been carried out in training staff and acquiring technology, medical supplies and prosthetics."

G.Dunkel

Activists brought Rainbow Solidarity for the Cuban Five and defense of the Cuban Revolution to Pride 2007 events in N.Y., L.A., Boston, Atlanta, Buffalo, San Diego and other cities. Above, Rainbow Solidarity signers Bev Hiestand (left) and Imani Henry (center).

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Feinberg, hoisting flag aloft, at Buffalo, N.Y., Youth Against War & Fascism (YAWF) protest against 1973 CIA-engineered counter-revolution in Chile.

About Leslie Feinberg

Leslie Feinberg, who identified as an anti-racist white, working-class, secular Jewish, transgender, lesbian, female, revolutionary communist, died on November 15, 2014.

Transgender Liberation

Feinberg was the first theorist to advance a Marxist concept of "transgender liberation," and her work impacted popular culture, academic research, and political organizing.

Pronouns & Trans* Language

In a statement at the end of her life, Leslie said she had "never been in search of a common umbrella identity, or even an umbrella term, that brings together people of oppressed sexes, gender expressions, and sexualities" and added that she believed in the right of self-determination for oppressed individuals, communities, groups, and nations.

Leslie preferred to use the pronouns she/zie and her/hir for herself, but also said:

"I care which pronoun is used, but people have been respectful to me with the wrong pronoun and disrespectful with the right one. It matters whether someone is using the pronoun as a bigot, or if they are trying to demonstrate respect."

Feinberg's historical and theoretical writings have been widely anthologized and taught in U.S. and international academic circles. Hir impact on mass culture was primarily through hir 1993 first novel, ***Stone Butch Blues***, widely considered in

and outside the U.S. as a groundbreaking work about the complexities of gender. Sold by the hundreds of thousands of copies and also passed from hand-to-hand inside prisons, the novel has been translated into Chinese, Dutch, German, Italian, Slovenian, Turkish, and Hebrew (with her earnings from that edition going to ASWAT Palestinian Gay Women).

Early Adult Life

Leslie Feinberg came of age as a young butch lesbian in the factories and gay bars of Buffalo, N.Y. in the 1960s. Since that time, Feinberg has been a grassroots activist and a journalist. Ze is known in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender movements in the U.S. and countries around the world. The lesbian magazine Curve named Feinberg one of the "15 Most Influential."

Feinberg was the opening speaker at the historic rally on the 25th anniversary of the 1969 Stonewall rally in New York City – a rally that drew one million people from across the country and around the world. A video about Leslie Feinberg entitled Outlaw has been distributed by Women Make Movies nationally and internationally. Feinberg's novel, ***Stone Butch Blues***, published on March 1, 1993, by Firebrand Books, has received a wildly popular response in the United States and has been translated into Chinese, German, Italian, Dutch, Turkish, Slovenian and Hebrew. The novel won the prestigious American Library Association Award for Gay and Lesbian Literature and a LAMBDA Literary Award.

Feinberg's non-fiction work, ***Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to RuPaul***, is the first analysis of the historical roots of transgender oppression. ***Transgender Warriors*** won the 1996 Firecracker Alternative Book Award for Non-Fiction. In Spring 1996, Beacon released the paperback edition, newly subtitled: ***Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman***. Feinberg's non-fiction book ***Trans Liberation: Beyond Pink or Blue*** (Beacon) contains a compilation of speeches by the author with written portraits by other trans activists.

Drag King Dreams, Feinberg's second published novel, was released by Carroll & Graf (Avalon) in March 2006. S/he is well-known in the U.S. and many other parts of the world as an activist who worked to help forge a strong bond between the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans communities. As a trade unionist, anti-racist, and socialist, Feinberg also organized to build strong bonds of unity between these struggles and those of movements in defense of oppressed nationalities, women, the disabled, and the working-class movement as a whole. Feinberg worked for decades in defense of the sovereignty, self-determination, and treaty rights of Native nations and for the freedom of political prisoners in the U.S. She was an internationalist and was part of the anti-Pentagon movement since the U.S. war against Vietnam.

A Workers World journalist since 1974, Feinberg became a managing editor in 1995. She was a member of the National Committee of Workers World Party.

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Books from Struggle for Socialism - La Lucha por Socialismo

CHINA
Celebrating 75 years of liberation

October 1, 2024, marked the 75th anniversary of China's transformative revolution, which liberated the nation from feudal oppression and imperialist control.

Under the leadership of Mao Zedong, the Communist Party of China achieved what many deemed impossible – inspiring not just China but working and oppressed peoples worldwide.

The revolution brought an end to China's 'Century of Humiliation,' which began with British imperialism's First Opium War in 1839. Over the past 75 years, there has been significant progress for the masses and China's working class.

Today, China stands as a global scientific powerhouse, boasting achievements in pollution reduction, and space exploration. The People's Republic has made significant strides in healthcare, education, and sports.

At no point has U.S. monopoly capitalism adopted a hands-off approach toward the development of socialism in China or elsewhere. The maneuvers by U.S. imperialism have been increasingly more dangerous and now point in the direction of war.

This book, **'The U.S. War Drive Against China: What it means for workers,'** aims to illuminate the growing dangers posed by a potential U.S. war against China and to reveal the real enemies of the working class.

https://tinyurl.com/USWarChina

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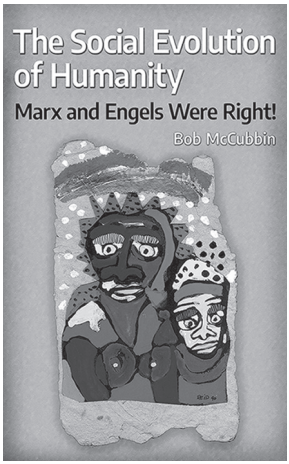
The Social Evolution of Humanity

Marx and Engels were right! Bob McCubbin



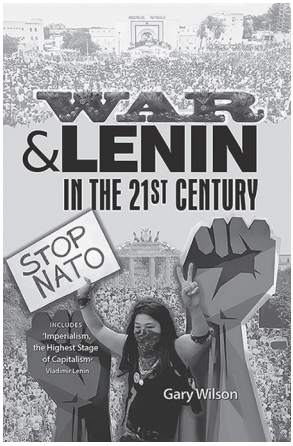
This study of the evolution of humanity focuses on human social/sexual relations and, in particular, the changing social status of women. It offers a selection of scientific evidence that updates and augments the viewpoint expressed in Frederick Engels' masterful work, '**Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State.'**

McCubbin is the author of '**Roots of Lesbian and Gay Oppression: A Marxist View**.' Published in 1976, during the first flush of the modern LGBTQ2S movement, McCubbin's unparalleled achievement was to offer a historical analysis of how LGBTQ2S oppression developed.

War & Lenin in the 21st Century

Gary Wilson

Includes U.S. complicity in the Gaza genocide and military profiteering and Lenin's pamphlet **'Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism'**



Vladimir Lenin, the revolutionary leader of the Soviet Union and a key contributor to Marxist theory, wrote **"Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism"** in 1916, more than a century ago. It remains an influential critique of imperialism.

When WWI broke out, Lenin's main interest was promoting a socialist revolution to end the war. He exposed the war's economic roots and identified imperialism's key features: monopoly capitalism, finance capital, the export of capital, and colonialism – the imperialist division of the world.

Does Lenin's analysis of imperialism hold up today?

The U.S. emerged from WWII as the world's most powerful imperialist country, It established the U.S. dollar as the international currency and engages in endless wars. As in Lenin's time, the conclusion is that socialist revolution will end imperialist war, enabling workers to meet their own needs.

Available in paperback or kindle at tinyurl.com/LeninAndWar

You would never know it from the capitalist media, but in addition to ensuring housing and health care for all, Cuba's revolution is making huge strides in gender and sexual liberation.

In 2022, Cuba held a referendum for a new Families Code, a major overhaul to the country's constitution in regard to sexuality, gender, and family life. This is one of the world's most progressive codes on families, and it passed with 66.85% in favor. This code greatly expands the rights of women, queer and trans people, and ultimately all Cubans.

U.S. transgender communist activist, Melinda Butterfield said:

> 'when it was reported – if it was reported at all in the capitalist media ... it was just, 'oh, Cuba has finally gotten around to adopting same sex marriage.' But the Families Code is so much bigger than that, and so much more comprehensive, and not only for the queer community, but for all families and all kinds of communities in Cuba.'

The code was developed and adopted via a mass-democratic process that happened across the country, with debate everywhere from neighborhood assemblies to labor union halls. This book documents how Cuba's socialist revolution made this possible, with plenty of discussion about what LGBTQ+ communities outside Cuba can learn from Cuba's example, at a time when capitalist governments like that of the U.S. are trying to erase queer and trans people and push back all gains made by working-class and oppressed people.

This book includes:

- Presentation by Cenesex director Mariela Castro Espín
- Discussion with a transmasculine Cuban activist
- Reports from LGBTQ+ delegation who went to Cuba to learn about new Families Code
- Report from delegation to Guantánamo Peace Seminar
- The full text of Leslie Feinberg's **Rainbow Solidarity in Defense of Cuba** and more.

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